THE NOVELS OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

CATHERINE BLUM

CATHERINE BLUM

THE NOVELS OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Messrs. Methuen are publishing a new edition in more convenient form of their famous translations of these great novels. The first volumes are:—

ACTÉ
CÉCILE
THE PRINCE OF THIEVES
ROBIN HOOD THE OUTLAW
THE CASTLE OF EPPSTEIN
THE CORSICAN BROTHERS AND OTHO THE ARCHER
THE BLACK TULIP
THE TAKING OF CALAIS
AMAURY
THE FENCING MASTER
GEORGES
THE GREAT MASSACRE
HENRI DE NAVARRE
CHICOT THE JESTER
THE WOLF LEADER
THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN PAMPHILE
THE BIRD OF FATE
CATHERINE BLUM
THE CONVICT'S SON
CROP-EARED JACQUOT

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO
(Abridged)

CATHERINE BLUM
AND OTHER STORIES

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

TRANSLATED BY

ALFRED ALLINSON

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

[*Copyright: all rights reserved*]

First Published in this Form in 1922

This Translation was First Published in October 1904.

INTRODUCTION

ALEXANDRE DUMAS is never more charming than when, having some simple story to tell, for which it suits his purpose to find a setting amongst the rustic scenes of his youth, he takes his readers by the hand, and chatting at his ease, leisurely leads them in fancy over the fields, across the stream, and into the woods of Villers-Cotterets. He does not merely see and describe, he actually reconstructs and presents to the reader as vividly as it first appeared to him any scene or incident which attracted him. And what attracted Dumas was frequently that which, if all saw, few noted or appreciated. Wandering with keen curiosity about the village on the morning of a fête long before there was any chance of the happening of the first event of the day, he drinks in every sight and sound, and a quarter of a century afterwards is able to recount how "the fiddlers swept and trod smooth the appointed dancing-place, and how the plaster dolls intended to be broken by the cross-bow bolts were set in line on their stakes, and the rabbits waited dolefully, frightened, and with ears dropped on their necks, for the hour when a ring cunningly threaded on a stake would decide their fate, and send them from the dealer's basket into the saucepan of the happy winner." Passages of this nature abound in "Catherine Blum."—a fresh and pleasing story, the merit of which has been testified to by Mr. Swinburne—and give it a truth and value which are inestimable when the object of the writer is to *convince*.

As the owner of a fine garden when surveying its treasures remembers the grafting and transplanting that make them his own, so Alexandre Dumas, when in old age his mind

ranged over the thousand volumes which bore his name, recalled that for one he was much indebted to a friend who had furnished its plot; that for another his son had suggested one of the chief characters; that a third had grown from a few words spoken by an actor in a play which he had witnessed and which had ignominiously failed. A stranger visiting Dumas' garden might well be excused for failing to discriminate between the native and imported plants. All are so well grown or so cunningly grafted that they pass for Dumas' own. Carefully examined, however, some would be found to exhale a foreign perfume. "Catherine Blum" has long passed as one of Dumas' own flowers, yet the parent stem grew in Germany. Let us see how it came to be transplanted.

One morning at Brussels, in the little house occupied by him in the Boulevard Waterloo, Dumas heard himself asked for and went out. A young man of remarkable appearance was endeavouring to gain an audience. From him the author of "Monte Cristo" presently heard a most lamentable history. Suffice it to say that the stranger was, or averred that he was, the Comte Max de Goritz, a political exile of noble birth, and at the last stage of destitution. Being acquainted with several languages, the idea had occurred to him to offer his services to Dumas. "All the world," said he, addressing our author in a final appeal, "knows that you have an excellent heart. If you refuse to employ me, or if you cannot do so, it only remains for me to blow out my brains. To-morrow morning all the Belgian papers will announce that there has been another suicide."

"To-morrow, my dear sir," replied Dumas, "all the Belgian papers will announce that you are my translator. Shake hands! From to-day I give you 350 francs a month."

What did the exile do in return? For one thing he ransacked the plays of the German comedian Iffland, and translating his *Die Jaeger*, placed it before the Master. It so happened that Alexandre, gratified with the success of his pastoral novel "Conscience l'Innocent," was meditating the composition of another story in the same *genre*.

It would have been easy enough to invent a plot, but here in the exile's translation lay one pat to his hand. Dumas, at once the laziest and most industrious of men, laid hold of it, and commenced the composition of "Catherine Blum." Yes, this tale, apparently so French, is in its framework the *Jaeger* of the German dramatist Iffland. In its framework only! for none of Dumas' books are more characteristic of him.

As for the translator, around whom hung an impenetrable mystery, he continued to flourish more or less well on his 350 francs a month. When Dumas at the end of a year or two returned to Paris, the industrious assimilator of German plays travelled with him to assist at the birth of and to feed the journal *Le Mousquetaire*. Somewhat, it would appear, to the disgust of his fellow contributors, his name in all its splendour figured on the huge posters which decorated the walls of the city. One fine morning, as if by enchantment, the Count disappeared. The same day his benefactor was invited by the police to inspect a formidable *dossier*, to which these words served as a summary :—

"The man calling himself Comte Max de Goritz is a German Jew, whose real name is Mayer. He lives with a prostitute, who gives herself out as the daughter of a certain Sieur de Richmont, one of the impostors who pretended to be Louis XVII. Mayer is a criminal of the most dangerous class, his crimes ranging from petty larceny to housebreaking, and not stopping short of murder. He is wanted by the police of Vienna."

Dumas was astounded. Then recovering himself,—

"*Ma foi!* gentlemen," he said, "this man presented himself one day at my house in Brussels, in the character of a political exile. He seemed clever, energetic, and reliable, and I employed him without a suspicion that at bottom he was a scoundrel (*bandit*) or worse. Just before you came I was told that he had run away from Paris, and I fear you will have difficulty in catching him as long as he has a leg left."

"Catherine Blum" was published in 1854 by Cadot (Paris). Some four years later, Dumas being hard pressed

for a play, wanted at a few days' notice, bethought himself of *Die Jaeger* and "Catherine Blum," and put a version of them on the stage under the title *Les Forestiers*. The drama was played with very great success, and has been frequently revived.

One day, in 1850, Dumas found himself the guest of Lord and Lady Holland at Holland House. At night he was conducted to the poets' room—so called from its having at different times been occupied by Samuel Rogers, Lord Byron, and other bards;—here, with his head on the pillow, he read Thomas Moore's "Life of Byron." Dawn filtered into the chamber, the birds awoke and sang; by and by it was broad daylight, but Alexandre, fascinated, still read on. When at length he rose, instead of leaving for Paris as he had intended to do, he journeyed to Newstead Abbey. Byron, of whose works he was a great admirer, now absorbed his thoughts, and a company of actors in Paris in need of his assistance at the rehearsals of a new play expected him in vain.

Moore's quotation from the account of the wreck of the *Juno* affected Dumas as deeply as it had affected Byron. He greatly desired to read the whole narrative, and when, some two years later, he discovered it in Sir G. Dalzell's "Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea" (1812), he could not resist the pleasure of making it known in France by recasting and publishing it.

Finding that this shipwreck, now somewhat inaccessible in English, is very little known, and believing that its perusal will produce no less effect upon our readers than it produced upon the authors of "Don Juan" and of "Antony," we have had it translated from the Frenchman's excellent version, and now in our turn present it.

"The Scourge of Naples" with which the present volume concludes, is a brilliant bit of journalism produced, or rather fired off, by Dumas from his Neapolitan home at a time when prolonged residence there had made him familiar not only with its diminishing oysters of Lake Fusaro, but with its increasing army of mendicants. His residence at

Naples would be considered by every beggar as a real piece of good fortune, while his remarkable appearance, accentuated by his careless attire (a suit of white canvas), would ensure his being sighted from afar by all—except such as were really blind beggars. Add to this his habit of careless giving, and it is plain that Dumas and the mendicants had very much to say to one another.

Dumas' treatment of his painful subject is entirely characteristic. He dashes at it, and with a few strokes of his pen places before the reader a vivid impressionist sketch of Naples which makes him see, feel, and hear the colour, atmosphere, and sounds of that city. One has to inhale some of the fog of Bloomsbury or of the vapours of the Underground Railway, or some other distinctive local odour, to feel at home and not at Naples while reading him. Observe, too, that Dumas lays the whole blame of the situation he describes upon the mendicants themselves. He depicts the visitor throwing one silver coin among a group of them to gratify his own vanity; then throwing another when the group has become a struggling crowd; and he evidently considers that the beggars are blameworthy for the disturbance, and not the visitor. Nor does it occur to him to inquire into the real origin of so much misery, or to suggest a remedy for it. It is enough for him to note its existence, and to describe it in such a way that no one who reads is likely to forget it. A whole treatise on mendicancy might be less convincing.

R. S. G.

CONTENTS

CATHERINE BLUM

CHAP.		PAGE
I	Preliminary	13
II	The New House on the Soissons Road	25
III	Mathieu Goguelue	33
IV	A Bird of Ill Omen	45
V	Catherine Blum	54
VI	The Parisian	63
VII	Jealousy	70
VIII	Father and Mother	78
IX	The Home-coming	86
X	Mademoiselle Euphrosine Raisin	96
XI	Dreams of Love	103
XII	The Abbé Grégoire	112
XIII	Father and Son	120
XIV	The Village Fête	130
XV	A Snake in the Grass	140
XVI	Opportunity Makes the Thief	150
XVII	At Père Watrin's	155
XVIII	François to the Rescue	163

CHAP. PAGE

XIX Mathieu Brought to Bay 175

XX Conclusion 185

THE "JUNO"

CHAP.

I 1795 197

II The Mizzen-top 203

III The Raft 208

IV The Pangs of Death 214

V Mrs. Bremner's Thirty Rupees . . 220

VI In which Mrs. Bremner's Thirty Rupees again come in useful 231

VII Conclusion 236

THE SCOURGE OF NAPLES 241

CATHERINE BLUM

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY

YOU were telling me only yesterday, my boy: "Father, you don't write enough books like 'Conscience.'"

To which I replied: "Give your orders; you know quite well I do anything you want. Tell me the sort of book you wish, and you shall have it."

Then you went on: "Well, I should like one of those tales of your boyhood, one of those little dramas of country life, whose scene is laid under the shadow of the giant trees of that noble Forest that made you a dreamer by its mystery and a poet by its charm of melancholy, one of those stories you sometimes tell at the fireside at home when you are fain of a respite from the long, romantic epics you weave for the world's delight,—trifles you do not deem worthy of pen and ink. I love your native countryside, father, though I have never been there in the body, though I have only seen it from afar off through the mist of your reminiscences, as we behold a landscape through the vapours of a dream."

Yes! I love the home of my fathers too, I love the village so dear to us all. I say *village*, for indeed it is no more, though it calls itself a market town. I love it so, I could bore you to extinction by mere dint of talking of it,—well not perhaps you, my own familiar friends, but other people to a certainty,—people less keenly interested in the subject. Villers-Cotterets is to me what Colmar is to my good friend Rusconi. For him Colmar is the centre

of the world, the axis of the globe, the hub of the universe! It was at Colmar he met so many celebrities. Carrel! "Where did you first meet Carrel, Rusconi?"—"I conspired with him at Colmar, in 1821." Talma! "When did you first meet Talma, Rusconi?"—"I saw him play at Colmar, in 1816." Napoleon! "Where did you first meet Napoleon, Rusconi?"—"I saw him pass through Colmar, in 1808." Well, everything dates for me from Villers-Cotterets just as everything dates for Rusconi from Colmar.

One advantage (or disadvantage) Rusconi has over me,—he was not born at Colmar; he was born at Mantua, the ducal town, the birthplace of Virgil and Sordello, whereas I was born at Villers-Cotterets.

So you see, my dear lad, I don't need much pressing to talk about my beloved little town, whose white houses grouped together in the hollow of the horse-shoe formed by its huge forest look like birds in a nest, over which the old Church with its long-necked steeple keeps watch and ward like a mother. You have but to take from my lips the seal that imprisons and confines my thoughts and words, for thoughts and words to escape alive and sparkling like the foam from the flagon of beer that makes us start and cry and jump at our exiles' table here, like the froth of champagne that wins a smile from us and brings us closer together as we recall the sunshine of our far-off home.

After all, isn't it there that I really lived, since it is there that I waited for life to begin? We live by hope more than by reality. What is it colours our horizon with gold and azure? Alas, my boy, you will know one day; it is Hope.

There I was born; there I uttered my first cry of pain; there under my mother's eye my first smile opened out like a flower on my face; there I ran, a yellow-haired boy with rosy cheeks, after those youthful illusions that so easily escape us, and if caught, leave behind on our fingers nothing but a pinch of velvety dust—butterflies their name. Alas! what I am going to say is both true and strange. It is only when we are young that we see beautiful butter-

flies; later come the wasps which sting; then the bats which foretell death.

The three periods of life can be summed up thus: youth, manhood, old age,—butterflies, wasps, bats!

There my father died. I was at the age when one does not know what death is—when one hardly knows what a father means.

Thither I brought my dead mother; there, in that charming graveyard, more like a children's flower-decked playing-ground than a burial place, she sleeps side by side with the war-worn hero of the Pyramids, the General who fought so well in Egypt. A tombstone that the hand of a woman who loved them both laid there covers them.

To right and left lie the grandparents, the father and the mother of my mother; aunts too whose names I remember, but whose faces I only see athwart the grey veil of many years.

It is there I shall go and sleep in my turn—but as late as possible, please God, for I shall be very loth to leave you, my darling lad.

On that day I shall find beside the mother who suckled me, the loving nurse who rocked me in my cradle,—dear good mother Zine, whom I speak of in my "Memoirs," and near whose bed the spirit of my father came and bade me adieu.

How should I not love to speak of that immense cradle of greenery so full of fond memories? I knew everything there, not only the townsfolk, not only the stones and the houses, but the very trees of the forest. As one by one those reminiscences of my youth disappeared, I have wept for them. O! good white heads of the little town, dear Abbé Grégoire, good Captain Fontaine, worthy old Niguet, dear cousin Deviolaine, I have sometimes tried to make you live again; but you only startled me, poor ghosts, I found you so pale and dumb in spite of my gentle and kindly summons. I have wept for you, ye sombre stones of the cloister of St. Rémy, ye colossal gates, ye gigantic staircases, ye narrow cells, ye cyclopean kitchens, that I have seen falling layer by layer, until the pick and shovel laid bare amid the ruins your foundations, broad as the

base of a city wall, your cellars, gaping wide as abysmal chasms! I have wept for you more especially, ye fine trees of the park, ye giants of the forest, ye families of rugged oaks, beeches with smooth silvery bark, trembling poplars and chestnuts with your pyramids of blossoms, round which there hummed in May and June swarms of bees, their brown bodies swollen with honey, and their feet all clogged with wax. You all fell suddenly in a few months, you who had so many years still to live, so many generations to shelter under your shade, so many loves to behold passing mysteriously and noiselessly over the mossy carpet which the ages had stretched at your feet! You had known François I. and Madame d'Étampes, Henri II. and Diane de Poitiers, Henri IV. and Gabrielle d'Estrelles; you spoke of those illustrious dead by the letters graven on your bark; you had hoped that those thrice enlaced crescents, those initials amorously twined with one another, those crowns of laurels and roses, would protect you from a commonplace death and from that mercantile God's acre called a timber-yard. Alas, you were mistaken, beautiful trees! One day you heard the resounding ring of the axe and the dull hiss of the saw . . . destruction was come upon you . . . death cried aloud to you: "Your hour has come, your pride is laid in the dust!"

And I have seen you lying on the ground, stripped from roots to topmost twig, your branches scattered round you; and it seemed to me that I had grown five thousand years younger and was walking over that immense battle-field which spreads between Pelion and Ossa, and that I was beholding stretched at my feet those three-headed hundred-armed Titans who strove to scale Olympus and whom Jupiter consumed with his lightning.

If ever you take a walk with me, leaning on my arm, dear child, in the midst of those mighty woods, if you cross through those scattered villages, if you sit down on those moss-covered stones, if you bow your head over those tombs, all will seem to you at first silent and dumb; but I will teach you the language of all those old friends of my youth, and then you will understand how sweet a murmur they make in my ear alive or dead.

We will begin from the East—that's the simplest way. For you the sun of life has hardly risen; its first rays are still making your blue eyes blink, your blue eyes that reflect the heavens. Then moving towards the South a little, we will go and see the charming Château of Villers-Hellon where I played as a child, seeking amidst the tree-clumps and through the green hedges those living flowers our games scattered hither and thither and which were called Louise, Augustine, Caroline, Henriette and Hermine. Alas, to-day two or three of these fair supple stalks have been broken by the wind of death; the others are mothers and some are grandmothers. All this was forty years ago, dear boy, and it is not till twenty long years hence you will know what forty means.

Continuing our course we go through Lorcy. Do you see that steep slope sprinkled with apple-trees which shoots its base into yonder pond with its green water and green weeds. One day three young fellows who had been run away with in a shay by a horse, gone imbecile or crazy (it was never precisely known which) were rolling down like an avalanche headlong into these abysmal depths! By a lucky chance one of the wheels caught against an apple-tree, which was almost torn up by the roots! Two of the three men were flung over the horse's head! The other, like Absalom, remained hanging to a branch—not by his hair, although his hair would have done very well for the purpose—but by his hand! The two young fellows who were thrown over the horse's head were my cousins Hippolyte Leury, of whom you have heard me speak sometimes, and the other my friend Adolphe de Leuven, of whom you are always hearing me speak; the third was myself.

What would have happened to my life and consequently to yours, my poor child, if that apple-tree had not been there just in the right place to stop us?

About half a league further on as we travel from east to south we should come upon a large farm-house. Ah, there it is, its main-building covered with red tiles and its outhouses with thatch. Its name is Vouty.

There still lives, at least I hope so (though he must be more than eighty years old nowadays), a man who has been

to my moral life—if I may so put it—what that good apple-tree which I spoke of a moment ago and which stopped our shay, was to my material life. Have a look through my "Memoirs" and you will find his name; it is that old friend of my father's who came into our house one day on his return from shooting with one half of his left hand blown away by the bursting of his gun. When the wild desire seized upon me to leave Villers-Cotterets and to come to Paris, instead of putting leading-strings to my shoulders and fetters round my legs, he said to me: "Go! Fate is urging you," and he gave me that famous letter of introduction to General Foy which opened to me the general's house and the offices of the Duc d'Orléans.

We shall give this dear old man a hasty embrace; for we owe him much. Then we shall continue our journey along a broad road which will take us to the top of a big hill.

From this hill-top behold yonder valley and river and town. They are the valley and river of Ourcq; the town La Ferté-Milon, where Racine was born.

We need not go down the hill and enter the town; nobody could show us the house which was inhabited by the rival of Corneille, the ungrateful friend of Molière, the poet who was sent away in disgrace by Louis XIV.

His works are in every library; his statue—the work of our great sculptor David—stands in the public square; but his house is nowhere—or rather the whole town that owes its fame to him is his house.

At any rate we know that Racine was born at La Ferté-Milon, whereas we do not know where Homer was born.

And now we are walking from the south to the west. That pretty village which seems to have just run out of the forest to come and warm itself in the sunshine is Boursonne. Do you remember "La Comtesse de Charny," one of my books that you like the best, dear lad? Well then, the name of Boursonne must be familiar to you. Yonder little Château inhabited by my old friend Hutin is Widow Charny's; thence the young gallant used to issue secretly at night leaning over the neck of his English horse, and in a few

minutes he was on the other side of the forest, under the shade cast by yonder poplars. Thence he could see Catherine's window open and shut. One night he came back streaming with blood; one of old Billot's balls had gone through his arm; another had ripped up his side. Finally one day he went out never to return. He was going to escort the king to Montmédy and was left lying on the public square of Varennes opposite the house of Sausse the grocer.

We have now crossed the forest from south to west, passing through Plessy-au-Bois, La Chapelle-aux-Auvergnats and Coyolles; a few steps more and we are at the top of the hill of Vauciennes.

It was a hundred yards behind where we stand that one day, or rather one night, on my way back from Crépy, I found the dead body of a lad of sixteen. I have related this grim and mysterious drama in my "Memoirs." The windmill which rises on the left of the road and which turns its great wings so slowly and so sadly, it alone—and God—knows how things happened there. Both remained voiceless. Man's justice struck at hap-hazard. Fortunately the murderer confessed at his death that it had struck true.

The watershed which we are going to follow and which commands that great plain on our right, and that beautiful valley on our left, is the scene of my hunting exploits. There I made my first essay in the Nimrod and Levaillant line. (I hear these are the two greatest huntsmen of ancient and modern times.) On my right was the realm of hares, partridges and quails; on my left that of wild duck, teal and snipe. Do you see that place which is greener than the rest and which looks like a delightful bit of green sward painted by Watteau? It is a peat-bog where I came very near to losing my life.

I was gently and gradually sinking down into it, when fortunately I bethought me of slipping my gun between my legs; the butt on one side, the muzzle on the other, met rather solider ground than that wherein I was beginning to sink; I stopped myself in this vertical plunge which could not have failed to take me right to the regions below. I

shouted. The miller of the mill you see yonder, standing beside the sluice of that great pond, ran towards me on hearing my cries. He flung me the leash of his dog; I caught hold of it. I was saved. As for my gun, of which I was very fond, and which killed at a long distance, I had but to squeeze my legs together, and it was saved along with me—which was a good thing, as I was not rich enough to have bought another.

Let us continue our journey. We are now going from the West towards the North. That ruin yonder, of which a fragment stands up like the Keep of Vincennes, is the tower of Vez, the only relic of an ancient feudal manor long since vanished and gone by. The tower is the spectre in granite of passed ages; it belongs to my friend Paillet. You remember that kindly head clerk who used to accompany me on shooting expeditions from Crépy to Paris, and whose horse, whenever we saw a *garde champêtre* or private individual, had the kindly habit of carrying off the sportsman, his gun, his hares, his partridges and his quails, whilst the other shooter like an inoffensive tourist walked about with his hands in his pockets, admiring the landscape and studying botany.

Yonder country house is the *Château des Fossés*. There my earliest sensations made themselves known; from there my earliest recollections date. It was at *Les Fossés* that I beheld my father coming out of the water from which, with the help of Hippolyte—that intelligent blackamoor who for fear of frost used to fling away the flowers and bring in the flowerpots under shelter—he had just dragged three drowning lads. The one of the three whom my father had saved was called Dupuy; that is the only name I remember. Hippolyte, an excellent swimmer, had saved the two others. There lived Moquet the *garde champêtre* who had been *nightmared*, and who set a trap on his chest to catch old mother Durand,[1] and Pierre the gardener who used to take his spade and cut the snakes in two, from whose insides live frogs would sally forth; there too flourished and waxed in years and honour old Truff, a quadruped not classed by Monsieur de Buffon, half dog, half bear, on whose back they

[1] See "The Wolf-Leader."

used to perch me straddle-legged, there to take my first lessons in equitation.

And now towards the North-West there is Haramont, a delightful village lost in the midst of its apple-trees, right in the centre of a clearing in the forest and made illustrious by the birth of honest Ange Pitou, the nephew of Aunt Angélique, the pupil of the Abbé Fortier, the fellow pupil of young Gilbert and the companion-in-arms of the patriot Billot. This claim to distinction—which is disputed by some people, who maintain (rightly enough perhaps) that Pitou never existed except in my imagination—being the only one that Haramont can boast of, let us continue our journey to the double pond between the Campiègne and the Vivières roads near which I received Boudoux's hospitality on the day I ran away from my mother's house in order to avoid going to the school at Soissons. Had I gone there, I should probably have been killed two or three years afterwards by the blowing up of the powder magazine, as some of my young comrades were.

Come to the middle of this wide alley which runs north and south. Half a league behind us lies the massive Donjon built by François I. and on which the hero of Marignan and Pavia set his salamander seal, and in front of us on the horizon a high hill covered with whin and fern. One of the most terrible of my youthful memories is connected with this hill. One winter's night when the snow had stretched its white carpet over this long wide alley, I observed that I was being followed silently by a beast twenty yards away. It was the size of a big dog, its eyes shone like two live coals.

I did not need to look twice at the brute to recognize it. It was an enormous wolf. If I had only had my gun or my carbine or only a bit of tinder and a flint! But I had not even a pistol, a big knife or a pen-knife. Fortunately I had been a sportsman for five years, though I was only fifteen at the time, and knew the ways of the night-prowler with whom I had to deal. I knew that so long as I should remain on my feet and did not run I had nothing to fear. But look, my boy, the hillside is all pitted with quagmires. I might fall into one of these, and then the wolf would be

on me with one bound, and we should have to see which had the better claws and teeth.

My heart beat violently; but I began to sing. At all times I have sung abominably out of tune. Had the wolf been the least bit musical he would have fled. My wolf was not. On the contrary the music seemed to please him. He chimed in with a plaintive second on a lower note which was wonderfully suggestive of the pangs of hunger. I stopped singing, and went jogging on in silent horror like one of those damned souls whose neck Satan had twisted round, and whom Dante meets in the third circle of hell, walking forwards and looking backwards. But I soon perceived that I was doing an imprudent thing. While looking in the wolf's direction I did not look at my feet. I stumbled; the wolf bounded forward. By good luck I did not fall down completely; but the wolf was only ten yards off now. For a few seconds my legs refused to move. In spite of ten degrees of cold the sweat was pouring from my brow. I stopped; the wolf stopped also. It took me five minutes to regain my strength. These five minutes seemed long apparently to my travelling companion: he sat down on his rump and uttered another howl—a still hungrier and more plaintive one than the first. That howl made me shiver to the marrow of my bones. I set out again, keeping my eyes on my feet, stopping each time that I wanted to see whether the wolf was following me, and whether he was getting nearer or keeping farther away. The wolf had started off at the same moment as I had, stopping when I stopped, walking when I walked, but always keeping as close as before—in fact rather coming closer than sheering farther off. At the end of a quarter of an hour he was only five yards from me. I was getting near the park, that is to say I was at that moment hardly a kilometre away from Villers-Cotterets; but my road was cut at this place by a wide ditch, that famous ditch which I jumped in order to give pretty Laurence from Paris an idea of my agility, and where I was so unlucky as to split my nankeen breeches which I had had made for my first communion—do you remember? I could easily have jumped that ditch and with more agility than on the day

in question, I assure you; but in order to jump it I should have had to run and I knew that before I had got a quarter of the way I should have the wolf on my shoulders. I was therefore obliged to make a détour and to go through a turnstile. All that would have been nothing if the turnstile had not been situated in the shade cast by the great trees of the park. What was going to happen whilst I was under the trees? Would not the gloom have just the opposite effect on the wolf from what it had on me? It frightened me; would it not embolden him? The thicker the darkness, the better a wolf can see.

However hesitation was impossible. I am not exaggerating when I say that there was not a hair of my head that had not its drop of sweat, not a thread of my shirt that was not soaked. As I passed through the turnstile I cast a glance behind me. The darkness was such that the wolf's form had disappeared. One could only see two glowing coals of fire in the darkness. Once I had got through, I twisted the turnstile violently round; the noise it made frightened the wolf who paused for a second: but almost immediately he leapt so lightly over the stile that I did not hear the snow crackle under his paws. And there he was at the same distance from me. I made for the middle of the forest drive by the shortest cut. I found myself in the light again and I beheld not only those terrible eyes which made holes in the darkness with their flaming pupils, but my friend the wolf's whole body. As I got nearer the town and his instinct warned him that I was going to escape from him he drew nearer. He was only three yards away from me and yet I neither heard the sound of his footsteps nor of his breathing. You would have said it was a beast of the imagination, a phantom wolf. Nevertheless I kept on my way. I crossed the tennis ground, I entered what is called the *Parterre*, a huge smooth and open lawn where I had no fear of quagmires. The wolf was so near me that if I had suddenly stopped he would have run his nose against my legs. I was dying with desire to stamp my feet, to clap my hands and swear loudly; but I did not dare. Had I dared to do so, without doubt he would have fled or at least for a moment have sheered off. I took ten minutes

to cross the greensward and I reached the corner of the castle wall. Then the wolf stopped. He was hardly a hundred and fifty paces from the town. I continued walking as before without hastening my steps. He, as he had done before, sat down on his rump and watched me moving off. When I was a hundred yards from him, he uttered a third howl still hungrier and more plaintive than the two others, which the fifty dogs of the Duc de Bourbon's pack answered in one common voice. This howl was an expression of regret at not having been able to have a bite of my flesh. There was no mistaking that. I do not know whether he passed the night where he halted; for no sooner did I feel myself in safety than I set out at a furious run and arrived pale and half dead at my mother's shop. You did not know my poor mother, or I should not need to tell you that she was more frightened by my story than I had been by the event. She undressed me, changed my shirt, aired my bed and put me in it as she used to do ten years before. Then she brought me a bowl of hot wine in my bed. As the fumes mounted into my head I felt twice as much remorse as before for not having essayed some of those doughty deeds which had been passing through my mind all the way home as a means of ridding myself of my enemy.

And now, my boy, let me pause at this episode like a good story-teller. I could not tell you anything more exciting. Besides, the preface has been as long as it ought to be—and longer. Among all the stories I have told *you* ten times over, choose the one which I should tell the public. But choose well, you understand; for if you choose ill, it is not I so much as you who will be blamed, if folks are bored instead of being amused.

"Well then, father, tell us the story of Catherine Blum."

"Is that the only one you really want?"

"Yes! it is my favourite of them all."

"Good! then we will choose your favourite, my boy!"

So I give you, dear readers one and all, the story of Catherine Blum. I can refuse my dear lad nothing, my blue-eyed laddie, and he has chosen this one.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW HOUSE ON THE SOISSONS ROAD

RIGHT across the stretch of ground, the north-eastern borders of the forest of Villers-Cotterets—a space which we omitted to traverse, since we began our journey at the Château of Villers-Hellon and ended it at the hill of Vivières—stretches like a great undulating serpent the high road from Paris to Soissons.

This road having crossed the forest for a mile to Gondreville and cut off a corner at the Croix-Blanche; having left the Crépy Road on its left and skirted the quarries of the Fontaine-Eau-Claire; having plunged into the valley of Vauciennes and come out again; having made straight for Villers-Cotterets, then leaves the town at the opposite extremity and goes at right angles to the foot of the hill of Dampleux, passing on one side the forest and on the other the plain where long ago stood the noble Abbey of Saint-Denis, amidst whose ruins I ran so gaily as a child and which to-day is only a pretty little country house with white walls, a slate roof, green shutters, lost amid flowers, apple-trees and the quivering leaves of aspens.

Then it boldly enters the forest which it crosses in its whole width, emerging two leagues and a half farther on at the posting house called Vertefeuille.

In all this distance only one house is met with, standing on the right side of the road; it was built in the time of Philippe-Égalité as a residence for a head-keeper. It was then named the *Maison Neuve*, and though seventy years have passed since it sprang up like a mushroom at the foot of the beeches and gigantic oaks which shelter it, like an old coquette who insists on being called by her Christian name, it clings to the juvenile name by which it was first known.

Why not? Is not the Pont-Neuf, built in 1577, in the reign of Henry III. by the architect Ducerceau, still called the Pont-Neuf?

Let us return to the *Maison Neuve*, which is the centre of the simple yet startling events we are about to relate, and let us make the reader acquainted with it by a detailed description.

The *Maison Neuve* stands, as one goes from Villers-Cotterets to Soissons, a little beyond the Stag's Leap, a place where the road narrows between two high banks and which got the name because at a hunting party of the Duc d'Orléans (Philippe-Égalité, I mean—Louis-Philippe was not a sportsman, as we all know), a terrified stag jumped from one bank to the other, that is to say leapt a space of more than thirty feet!

It is as you leave this sort of defile that you perceive about five hundred paces farther on the *Maison Neuve*, a building of two storeys, having a roof pierced with storm-windows, two ordinary windows on the ground floor and two up above.

The windows on one side of the house look towards the west, that is to say towards Villers-Cotterets, whilst the front, facing the north, opens straight into the road by the door which gives admittance into the ground floor room and by a window which lets the light into a room above. The window is immediately above the door.

At this place, as at Thermopylæ (where there was only room for two chariots to drive abreast), the road narrows to the width of the paved cart road in the middle, confined as it is on one side by the house, on the other by the garden of that same house which instead of being situated as is usually the case, behind the building or on one of its flanks, is situated in front of it.

The house bears a very different look according to the seasons.

In the spring, clothed with its green vines as with an April robe, it warms itself lovingly in the sun; one might say then that it had come out of the forest to settle by the roadside. Its windows, and especially one of the windows of the first floor, are enlivened with charlock, convolvulus and all kinds of flowers, which form as it were blinds of greenery embroidered with silver sapphire and golden blossoms. The smoke that rises from its chimney is but a

bluish and transparent vapour which hardly leaves a trace in the atmosphere. The two dogs that live in the two compartments of the kennel built on the right of the door have come out of their wooden shelter; one is lying peacefully asleep with its muzzle extended between its two paws; the other, who has doubtless slept enough during the night, is gravely seated on its rump, and with its wrinkled face is blinking at the sun. These two dogs, which belong (of course) to the venerable breed of wry-legged bassets—a breed that has had the honour of having my illustrious friend, Decamp, for painter-in-ordinary, are (of course again) a female and a male. The bitch is called *Ravaude* and the male, *Barbaro*. On this last point, however, that of the names, it would be pedantic to be too absolute.

In summer it is another business. The house takes a nap and shuts its eyelids of wood. No daylight enters in. Its chimney remains without a breath of smoke. Only the door, towards the north, remains open to watch the road. The two basset-hounds are either inside their kennel, in the depth of which the traveller only perceives a shapeless mass, or else stretched alongside the wall, at the foot of which they seek the coolness of shade and the dampness of the stone.

In autumn the vine has turned red; the green robe of spring has taken on warm and gleaming tones like those of worn velvet and satin. The windows stand half open; but the charlock has now been succeeded by chrysanthemums. The chimney begins once more to scatter white wreaths of smoke into the air, and when you pass in front of the door, the fire burning on the hearth, although half hidden by the pot in which the soup is boiling and by the pan in which the rabbit is stewing, attracts the traveller's eye.

Ravaude and *Barbaro* have shaken off the somnolence of April and the sleep of July; they are full of ardour and even of impatience; they are tugging at their chains and barking and howling. They feel that the hour of activity has come for them, that the shooting season has opened, and that they must make war, and serious war, on their eternal enemies, rabbits, foxes, and even wild boars.

In winter the aspect becomes mournful; the house is cold and shivers. No more green or red-shot dress; the vine has dropt its leaves one by one with the sad murmur of falling leaves; it stretches out its bare branches on the wall. The windows are close shut; every flower has disappeared; all you can see now is the strings, slack like those of a harp unstrung, up which the convolvulus used to climb.

A mighty shower of dense smoke escaping from the chimney in spiral wreaths proclaims that, wood being one of the perquisites of the ranger, wood is not economized. As for *Ravaude* and *Barbaro*, one might look in vain for them in the empty kennel; but if by chance the house door opens at the moment when the traveller passes, and were he to plunge a curious look into the interior of the house, he would see them standing out staidly against the flame of the fireplace. From there the master or mistress kicks them every now and again, but they as obstinately return to enjoy a heat of fifty degrees, fierce enough to burn their paws and muzzles, and which they only manage to fight by turning their head mournfully to right or to left and by raising alternately one foot or the other with a plaintive cry.

That was and still is what the New House on the Soissons Road is like externally, except perhaps for the flowers which betoken the presence of a girl with a tender and restless heart.

Seen from the inside, it offered first on the ground floor the great entrance-hall which we have had a glimpse of, furnished with a table, a dresser, and six wooden chairs. The walls were adorned with five or six engravings, representing, according to the different government epochs, which succeeded one another, Napoleon, Josephine, Marie-Louise, the King of Rome, Prince Eugène and the death of Poniatowski—or else the Duc d'Angoulême, the Duchesse d'Angoulême, Louis the XVIII., his brother *Monsieur*, the Duc de Berry—or again the Duc d'Orléans and a group of light and dark haired children, to wit, the Duc de Nemours, the Prince de Joinville, the Duc d'Aumale and the Princesses Louise, Clementine and Marie.

Above the chimney-piece three double-barrelled guns hang drying in greased linen wrappings, recovering from their last exposure to rain and mist. Behind the hearth lies a bakehouse, opening on to the forest through a little window.

Built on to the east side of the house is a rambling kitchen which was added to the building when it was found that the dwelling was too small for the inhabitants and the old kitchen had to be transformed into a bedroom.

This bedroom, once a kitchen, is usually that of the son of the house. On the first storey are two other bedrooms, that of the master and mistress (the keeper and his wife), and that of their daughter or niece, if they have a daughter or a niece.

Five or six generations of rangers have succeeded one another in this house, and it was at the door and in the first room that the bloody drama took place which brought about the death of the head-ranger Choron [1] in 1829.

But at the time when the story which we are going to relate opens—that is to say in the early days of May, 1829, the *Maison Neuve* was inhabited by Guillaume Watrin, head-ranger of the Chavigny district, by Marianne Charlotte Choron, his wife, commonly known as " Mother " for short, and by Bernard Watrin, their son, generally known only by the name of Bernard.

A young girl, the heroine of this tale, called Catherine Blum, had also lived in this house, but had not done so for the last eighteen months.

However, we shall duly mention the reasons for the absence, the presence, the age, the appearance, and the character of the personages, as is our custom, just as they happen to come on the scene.

So let us transport ourselves without more ado to the epoch we have spoken of, to wit the 12th of May, 1829.

It is half-past three in the morning; the first gleams of daylight are filtering through the leaves of the trees which are still green with that virginal green that only lasts a few weeks; the slightest wind causes a frozen dew to rain down from the tips of the branches where it

[1] See the author's "Memoirs."

hangs trembling and besprinkle the tall grasses like a hail of diamonds.

A young man of twenty-three or twenty-four, light-haired, with bright and intelligent eyes, walking with that rhythmical gait familiar to those who are accustomed to walking long distances, clothed in the neat uniform of the rangers, that is to say the blue jacket with the silver oak leaf on the collar, with a cap to match on his head, with his ribbed velvet breeches, his great leather gaiters with copper buckles, holding in one hand his gun slung over his shoulder, and in the other a sleuth-hound in a leash, was crossing the park-wall through a gap, and keeping carefully the middle of the road more from habit than to avoid the dew, with which he was soaked as if with rain, was advancing by the forest path of the Houchard lands towards the New House on the Soissons Road, whose west front he had been looking at for a considerable time from the other side of the road, the front that is on which there are the four windows..

Having reached the end of the path he saw that door and windows were shut. Every soul was still fast asleep in the Watrins' house.

"Good," muttered the young man, "they are taking it easy in old Guillaume's house. I understand the father and mother—but Bernard, a lover! Should a lover ever sleep?"

And he crossed the road, drawing near to the house with the evident intention of remorselessly disturbing the slumbers of its inhabitants.

At the sound of his steps the two dogs came out of their kennel, ready to bark both at the man and at the bloodhound, but doubtless they recognized their old friend, for their mouths opened immediately not for a threatening bark but for a friendly fawn. At the same time their tails swept the ground gaily as the newcomers drew nearer. Evidently they did not consider them as strangers, though not exactly belonging to the house.

Having reached the threshold, the bloodhound fraternized with the two bassets, whilst the ranger resting the butt end of his gun on the ground knocked with his fist

against the door. There was no reply to this first summons.

"Halloa! Père Watrin," growled the young man, striking a second time with more energy than the first. "Are you deaf, I wonder!" And he applied his ear to the door. "At last," said he, after a moment's attention, "that's a good thing."

This expression of satisfaction was wrung from him by a slight sound he heard inside. This sound which was softened by distance and by the thickness of the door was caused by the staircase creaking under the step of the old head-ranger. The young man had too practised an ear to mistake this noise and take the step of a man of fifty for that of a lad of twenty-five. "So," he muttered, "So, it's old Guillaume"; then aloud: "Good day," he cried, "open the door, Père Guillaume—it's me."

"Ah, ah!" said a voice coming from inside, "it's you, François? Why, of course. Who else should it be? Coming, coming."

"All right. Put on your breeches—there is no hurry, although it is not over warm, to be sure. Ugh!" And the young man beat his feet alternately on the ground while the bloodhound sat down shivering and all steeped in dew like his master. At that moment the door opened and he saw the grey head of the old ranger already adorned, early as it was, with a cutty pipe, though it is true the pipe was not yet alight. The said cutty, which had begun by being a pipe and which had become a cutty as the result of a series of accidents which had one after another shortened its stem, never left Guillaume Watrin's lips for more than the time strictly necessary for its owner to knock out the old ashes and put in the fresh tobacco. Then it took once more its accustomed place in the left corner of his mouth between two teeth hollowed out like a pair of pincers. There was yet another occasion on which the cutty smoked in the hand of old Guillaume instead of between his lips; and this was when his inspector did him the honour of addressing him. Then old Guillaume drew his cutty respectfully from his mouth, wiped his lips on the sleeve of his coat, passed the hand that held the pipe behind his back and answered.

Père Guillaume seemed to have been brought up in the school of Pythagoras; when he opened his mouth to put a question, the question was always put in the shortest possible way; when he opened his mouth to answer one, the answer was always as concise as possible. We are wrong in saying when he *opened* his mouth. Guillaume's mouth never opened except to yawn—that is supposing he ever had yawned, which is not likely. For the rest of the time Père Guillaume's jaw, accustomed to keep between his teeth a bit of pipe which often had no more than the tenth of an inch of stem, never unlocked; the result was a whistling which had some analogy with that of a serpent, his words being obliged to escape through the chink of his two jaws—a chink produced by the thickness of the pipe-stem, but which offered barely enough space to slide a five sou piece through. When the pipe had left old Guillaume's mouth to allow its master to empty it or fill it, or to allow him to answer some high and mighty personage, the words instead of being easier, became more strident; the whistling instead of diminishing, increased. The reason was simple. The pipe stem no longer keeping the jaws apart the teeth of the upper jaw weighed down on those of the lower with all their customary weight. And then he was a clever fellow who could hear what Père Guillaume said. This salient characteristic in old Guillaume's physiognomy being established, let us proceed to complete his portrait.

He was, as we have said, a man about fifty. His height was above the average. He was erect and wiry, with thin grey hair, heavy eyebrows, bushy whiskers that made a frame to his face, little piercing eyes, a long nose, a sarcastic mouth and a pointed chin. Without appearing to listen or see, he kept his eye always on the watch, and both saw and heard in a marvellous way either what went on between his wife, his son and his niece in his own house, or what went on in the forest among the partridges, rabbits, hares, foxes, polecats and weasels, animals which since the beginning of the world have made war on one another as ferociously and as persistently as the Messenians and the Spartans did from 774 to 370 B.C.

Watrin had a great veneration for my father and some

partiality for myself. He had preserved under a globe the glass from which General Dumas used to drink when he went shooting with him, and from which ten, fifteen and twenty years afterwards he never failed to make me drink when we went out together.

Such was the man who, pipe in mouth, put his mocking face through the open door of the *Maison Neuve* on the Soissons Road to welcome at 4 o'clock in the morning the young ranger whom he had called François, and who complained of cold, albeit for a month and twenty-seven days, according to Mathieu Laensberg, that charming season of the year called Spring had been with us. Seeing whom he had to do with, Guillaume Watrin opened the door wide and the young man walked in.

CHAPTER III

MATHIEU GOGUELUE

FRANÇOIS walked straight to the fireplace and put down his gun in the corner, whilst the bloodhound, which answered to the characteristic name of *Louchonneau*, went and sat unceremoniously down among the ashes yet warm from yesterday's fire.

What had caused the name of *Louchonneau* (Squint-eye) to be given to the bloodhound was a tuft of reddish hair—a sort of beauty-spot—which had grown in the corner of his eyelid, and which made him occasionally squint by dragging his eye down.

Louchonneau had for three leagues round the reputation of being the best bloodhound in Villers-Cotterets. Although still very young to have made his mark in the great art of venery, François on his side was regarded as one of the cleverest trackers of the district. When there was some plan of campaign to study on the spot, some wild boar to head off, it was always François who was charged with the ticklish job. For him the forest, no matter how black the night, had no mysteries; a broken blade of grass, a

turned leaf, a tuft of hair caught in a bramble revealed to him from the first scene to the last a whole nocturnal drama, which one would have thought had had no theatre but the grass, no witnesses but the trees and no lights but the stars.

As the *fête* of Corcy was to take place the ensuing Sunday, the rangers of the forests surrounding that pretty village had received from the Inspector, M. Deviolaine, the authorization to kill a wild boar on the occasion. In order to be sure that this wild boar should not escape and so cause the hunters to draw a blank, François had been the man commissioned to head it off. He had just accomplished this task with his usual conscientiousness when we met him in the forest path of the Houchard lands, followed him to Père Guillaume's door and heard him say to this latter, stamping with his feet the while: "Put on your breeches. There is no hurry, though it's not over warm. Ugh!"

"What!" answered old Guillaume, when François had deposited his gun near the fireplace and *Louchonneau* had sat down with his rump in the ashes—"not warm in the month of May? . . . What would you have said if you had served in the Prussian campaign, you softy?"

"One moment! When I say 'not warm,' you understand, Père Guillaume, it's only a manner of speaking. . . . I say it's not warm o' nights. . . . The nights don't go so fast as the days—you must have observed that, probably because they can't see clear. Well, by day, one is in May, by night one is in February. . . . So I won't unsay what I have said; it is not warm! Ugh!"

Guillaume stopped in the act of striking a light, and looking at François out of the corner of his eye and in the manner of *Louchonneau*: "Look here, my boy," he said, "shall I tell you something?"

"Say away, Père Guillaume," answered François, looking at the old ranger with that mocking air so characteristic of the Picardy peasant and of his neighbour the peasant of the Ile-de-France: "say away, you can talk first-rate, when you choose."

"Well, you are playing the ass in order to have some bran-mash."

"I don't understand."

"You don't understand——"

"No, on my word of honour."

"Yes, you say you are cold only to get me to offer you a dram."

"Good Lord! No, I never thought of it. Which does not mean that I should refuse it, if you did offer me one,—oh no, not I; I know too well the respect I owe you for that." And he remained with his head on one side, continuing to look at old Guillaume with a mocking eye.

Guillaume, without saying a word except *hum!* which indicated doubts about the disinterestedness and respect of François, struck his flint and steel together again. At the third blow the tinder took fire and began to crackle. Guillaume, with a finger which seemed perfectly insensible to heat, pressed the tinder down on the mouth of his pipe stuffed with tobacco and began to breathe in the smoke, which he puffed out at first in an imperceptible vapour, then soon in wreaths which got thicker and thicker until, judging that his pipe was sufficiently lighted and being no longer afraid of its going out, he restored to his inhalations their wonted calm and regularity. All the time he had been employed over this serious task the face of the worthy head-ranger had only expressed a sincere and concentrated preoccupation; but the feat once accomplished, a smile reappeared on his countenance and, going towards the sideboard, out of which he pulled a bottle and two glasses, he said: "Well, we will have a word with the brandy bottle first and then we will discuss our little affairs." Only a word! He is not much of a conversationalist, is old Guillaume! As if not to disprove what François had said, old Guillaume filled the two glasses standing together; then bringing his beside the young man's and gently clinking them together—"Here's your health," he said. "Here's yours and your wife's! And may heaven make her less pig-headed!" "Good," said old Guillaume, with a grimace, which was meant for a smile. And taking

his cutty in his left hand, he passed it behind his back according to custom and carried the right with the glass to his mouth, swallowing the contents at a single gulp.

"Wait a bit!" said François, laughing. "I have not finished and we shall be obliged to begin again. Here's to the health of your son Bernard!" And he in turn drained the little glass, tasting it however with more refinement and pleasure than the old ranger had. But at the last drop, stamping his foot as if in despair. "Ah," said he, "I have forgotten somebody."

"Whom have you forgotten?" asked Guillaume, puffing vehemently two mouthfuls of smoke from his pipe, which during the journey it had made had almost gone out. "Whom have I forgotten!" cried François. "*Pardieu*, Mademoiselle Catherine, your niece—oh it's not right to forget the absent—but my glass is empty, Père Guillaume." And pouring out the last drop of clear spirit on the nail of his thumb—"See," said he, "there is a topaz on my nail!" Guillaume made a grimace as much as to say, "You humbug, I know your plan, but considering your good intentions, I excuse it." Père Guillaume talked little, as we have said; but to make up, he had carried the science of pantomime to its highest pitch. His grimace over, he took the bottle and poured in such a way that the glass overflowed into the saucer. "Look!" said he. "Oh," replied François, "Père Guillaume has not played the curmudgeon this time. One can see he loves his pretty little niece!" Then lifting the glass to his lips with an enthusiasm in which the girl and the liquor might each claim their share. —"Oh, who would not love her," said he, "the dear little *demoiselle* Catherine? She's like brandy." And this time, following the example given him by old Guillaume, he emptied his glass at a single gulp. The old ranger performed the same movement and the same action with a thoroughly military regularity; only each expressed in a different way the satisfaction the liquor gave him as it passed down his throat. "*Hum!*" said one; "*houch!*" said the other. "Are you still cold?" asked Father Guillaume. "No," said François; "on the contrary, I am warm." "Well, then, you feel better?" "Rather;

I am set fair now, like your barometer!" "That being so," said Father Guillaume, plunging into the question which neither had touched as yet, "we are going to talk wild-boar a little." "Oh, the wild boar," said François, winking, "we've got him this time, Père Guillaume, I do think."

"Yes, like the last time!" said a sharp and mocking voice, which suddenly rasping behind the two rangers, made them both start violently. Both turned round simultaneously and with a single movement, though they had quite well recognized the individual to whom the voice belonged. But this latter, with the manner of one of the household, passed behind the two rangers, contenting himself with adding to the few words he had said—"Good-day to you, Père Guillaume, and to your friend." And he went and sat down beside the hearth, which he brightened up by throwing on the ashes a bit of faggot, which took fire with a crackle at the touch of the first match he applied to it. Then drawing out of the pocket of his coat two or three potatoes, he plunged them side by side into the ashes, with which he covered them over again with all an epicure's precaution. The man who had just arrived in time to interrupt at the very first phrase the story which François was going to begin, deserves, on account of the part which he is going to play in this tale, to have his physical and moral portrait given.

He was a lad of from twenty to twenty-two, with reddish hair flattened down on his head, a low brow, squinting eyes, a snub nose, a protruding mouth, a retreating chin, a scant and dirty beard. His neck, hardly hidden by the torn collar of his shirt, let one see that sort of hideous wen (so common in the Valais of Switzerland, but fortunately so rare with us) which is called a *goître*. His arms were awkwardly fitted on to his body and seemed absurdly long, and gave to his dragging, sleepy gait the sort of appearance of those great apes that M. Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, the great naturalist, has termed, I think, chimpanzees. When he huddled on his heels or sat on a stool, the resemblance between the half-developed man and the complete monkey became yet more striking, for at such

times he could—like these Simian caricatures of the human biped—with the aid of his hands or feet pick up from the ground or draw to him all the different things he required, and that almost without any movement of his trunk, which was as badly moulded as the rest of his person. Lastly, the whole of this ungraceful person was supported by feet which rivalled Charlemagne's in size and width, and which, but for the name, might have set the standard of that measure which is called a "King's foot," after the illustrious chief of the Carlovingian race.

As for the moral side, the share of favours bestowed on him by nature was even more restricted than on the physical side. Unlike those ugly dirty scabbards which sometimes enclose a beautiful and excellently finished rapier, the body of Mathieu Goguelue (that was the name of the person we are dealing with)—his body, I say, enclosed a bad, spiteful soul. Was he thus by nature, or had he tried to make others suffer, because others made him suffer? That is a point we leave to wiser heads than ours to debate and resolve with regard to the philosophical question of the reaction of the physical on the moral. However that may be, this at any rate is true, that every being weaker than Mathieu uttered a cry the moment Mathieu touched it; a bird, because he tore its feathers out; a dog because he trod on its toe; a child because he pulled its hair. On the other hand, in the case of the strong, Mathieu, without ceasing to jibe, was humble; did he receive an insult, an outrage, a blow, however sharp the insult, however grave the outrage, however violent the blow, and however keen the moral or physical pain, the face of Mathieu continued to smile with the same foolish, half idiotic expression. But insult, outrage and blow were registered in the depths of Mathieu's heart in indelible letters; one day or another the injury was repaid a hundred-fold without anyone being able to guess the quarter from which the retribution came, and Mathieu felt in the depths of his being a gleam of sombre and sinister joy which often made him say within himself that he was glad of the hurt that had been done him because of the satisfaction he felt in returning it.

Still, in excuse for his evil nature, one had to admit

that his life had always been precarious and unhappy. One day he had been seen coming out of a kind of ravine where some of the gipsy vagrants who wander through the forest had abandoned him. He was three years old, half-naked and could hardly speak. The peasant who had met him was called Mathieu; the ravine whence he issued was called Goguelue, and so the child got the name of Mathieu Goguelue. There was no question of baptism; Mathieu had not been able to say whether he was baptized or no. Besides, who would have taken care of the soul when the body was in such a wretched plight that he could only live on charity or on theft. And in this way he reached man's estate. Although ill-built and ugly, Mathieu was vigorous; although in appearance idiotic, Mathieu was sharp and cunning. Had he been born in Oceania, on the banks of Senegal or in the seas of Japan, the savages might have said of him what they say of the monkeys: "They do not talk for fear they should be taken for men and forced to work." Mathieu pretended to be weak; he pretended to be imbecile; but if an occasion presented itself in which he was obliged to show his strength or to give proof of his intelligence, he displayed either the brute force of the bear or the deep cunning of the fox; and the danger once passed or the desire satisfied, Mathieu became Mathieu again, the Mathieu everybody knew, the Mathieu who was the familiar laughing-stock of all, a peevish, imbecile, impotent figure. Abbé Grégoire, that excellent man whom I have spoken of in my "Memoirs" and who is called upon to play a part in this book, had had pity on the unhappy cerebral organization; regarding himself as the natural guardian of the wretched orphan, he had desired to make him advance a degree in the chain of being and make a vertebrate animal out of this polypus; in consequence for a year he had strained body and soul to teach him to read and write. At the end of a year Mathieu had left the worthy priest's hands with the reputation of a double distilled ass. The common opinion, that is to say that of the fellow pupils of Mathieu, the private opinion, that is to say that of his master, was that Mathieu did not know an O when he saw one and could not write an L; but

fellow pupils and master alike were wrong. Both public and private opinion were at fault. Mathieu could not read as well as M. de Fontanes—who was considered the best reader of his day—but Mathieu could read and pretty fluently too. Mathieu could not write like M. Prudhomme, the pupil of Brard and St. Omer, but Mathieu could write and pretty legibly too. Only, nobody had ever seen Mathieu reading or writing. On his side old Guillaume had endeavoured to draw Mathieu out of his physical brutishness from the same sentiment which had urged the Abbé Grégoire to draw him out of his moral brutishness, that is to say from that gentle pity for one's fellow-creature and that instinct of self-respect which exist in all good hearts. He had observed in Mathieu a certain capacity for imitating the song of birds, parodying the cry of wild beasts and following a trail; he had recognized that with his squint eye Mathieu could quite well see a rabbit or a hare in its form; he had perceived more than once that there was a deficit of powder in his flask and bullets in his bag, and he had drawn the conclusion that, as it is not absolutely necessary to be built on the model of Apollo or Antinous to make a good ranger, he might succeed in utilizing the talents of Mathieu and make a decent under-keeper of him. With this intention he had spoken about Mathieu to M. Deviolaine, who had authorized Père Guillaume to put a gun in the hands of his protégé. So the gun had been put in Mathieu's hands, but at the end of six months' practice in his new apprenticeship, Mathieu had killed two dogs and wounded a beater without having touched a single head of game. Then Guillaume, convinced that Mathieu had all the instincts of a poacher but none of the qualities of a keeper, had taken away the gun of which he had made such unskilful use, and Mathieu, heedless of this affront which yet closed the brilliant perspective which for a moment had been opened up before him and which would have dazzled eyes less careless and less philosophical than his, had resumed without a sense of shame his life of wandering and thieving.

In this roaming life the *Maison Neuve* on the Soissons Road and old Guillaume's hearth were one of his favourite

halting places in spite of the hatred or rather instinctive disgust which old Madeleine felt towards him—for she was too good a housewife not to see the harm done her garden and larder by the presence of Mathieu Goguelue—and Bernard, the son of the house, whom we only know by the toast drunk in his honour by François, and who seemed somehow to divine the fatal influence which this vagabond guest at his hearth was to have one day on his destiny.

It remains to be said that just as everybody was ignorant of the secret progress that Mathieu had made with the good Abbé Grégoire in reading and writing, so everybody was also unaware that this want of skill was feigned and that, when Mathieu chose, he could discharge his shot at a partridge or his bullet at a wild boar with as much accuracy as any of the Forest sportsmen.

Now why did Mathieu hide his talents from the eyes of his companions and the admiration of the public? It was because Mathieu had come to the conclusion that it might be useful for him not only to read, write and shoot, but still more useful in certain circumstances that he should be considered clumsy and illiterate.

So we see that it was an odious and wicked lad who, coming in just at the moment when François was beginning his story, had interrupted this story by words of doubt concerning the wild boar which the young keeper thought he had as good as in the hollow of his hand.

"Yes, like the last time!"

"Oh, the last time was enough," answered François. "We will talk about that presently."

"And where is the boar?" asked old Guillaume, whose tongue was for the moment set free by the necessity of introducing a new fill into his pipe.

"He's already in the salting tub, now that François has got his hand on him," said Mathieu.

"No, not yet," answered François, "but before the cuckoo clock strikes seven he will be there. Won't he, *Louchonneau*?" The dog, whom the fire rekindled by Mathieu was steeping in evident bliss and beatitude, turned round at his master's call and, sweeping the ash of

the hearth the while with his long tail, he uttered a little friendly growl which seemed to reply in the affirmative to the question which this latter had just asked him.

Satisfied with the answer of *Louchonneau*, François turned his eyes away from Mathieu Goguelue with a disgust which he did not trouble to conceal, and resumed his conversation with old Guillaume, who, delighted at having a fresh pipe to smoke, made ready to listen to his young companion with complaisance and serenity.

"Well, I mean to say, Père Guillaume," François continued, "that the animal is only a quarter of a league from here in the Têtes de Salmon covert near the Meutart meadows. The rascal set out at half-past two in the morning from the wood on the Damplieu road."

"Oh, how do you know that?" interrupted Goguelue, "seeing you only started at three o'clock?"

"Ah, there's a poser, Père Guillaume. He asks me how I know that. Well, Squinty, I'll tell you. It may serve you in good stead some day." François had a bad habit which annoyed Mathieu immensely, and that was to apply the name of *Louchonneau* (Squinty) to the man and to the beast indiscriminately, on the ground that both being subject to the same infirmity—although to his way of thinking the bloodhound squinted in a much nicer way than the man—the same name could serve to designate both biped and quadruped. At first sight dog and man seemed equally indifferent to this, but we are bound to say that in the manifestation of this indifference the dog only was sincere. So François continued, never imagining that he had just increased by a new grievance the sum of ancient grudges which embittered the heart of Mathieu Goguelue against him.

"What o'clock does the dew fall?" said the young keeper. "At three o'clock, isn't it? Well, if he had set out after the dewfall he would have crushed the wet earth, and there would be no water in the hoof-marks; whereas on the contrary he has poached up the dry earth, then the dew has fallen and made drinking troughs for the robins all along the road. That is what happened."

"How old is the beast?" asked Guillaume, considering

that Mathieu's observation had only slight importance or that after François' explanation Mathieu must be sufficiently edified.

"Oh! six or seven," said François; "a regular plump one."

"Halloa," said Mathieu, "he seems to have shown you his birth-certificate!"

"He did. And signed it with his claws. That's more than most could do! And unless he has reasons for keeping his age a secret I can answer for it that I am not out of it by three months. That's so, *Louchonneau*, isn't it? Look, Père Guillaume, *Louchonneau* says I am not making a mistake!"

"Is he all by himself?"

"No, he's with his sow, and she's big with young."

"Ah! ha! ha!" interrupted Mathieu, with a coarse laugh, quite unable to allow François to go quietly on with his story.

"Is it a new animal?" asked old Guillaume, who wanted to know whether the number of wild boars in his district was increasing, diminishing or remaining stationary.

"The sow is," answered François, with his usual assurance, "the boar is not. I never saw her traces; but I know *him* well. And that's what I was saying to you a moment ago when that wretched Goguelue came in; that I was going to renew acquaintance with my wild boar of the other day. It is the same beast I shot in the shoulder a fortnight ago, away by the Ivors coverts."

"And what makes you think it is the same?"

"Oh, must I tell *you* that, you old bloodhound, that could give *Louchonneau* points. Look here, *Louchonneau*, here's Père Guillaume asking. . . . I knew right enough I had touched him; only instead of putting a bullet into his heart, I put one into his shoulder."

"Hum!" said old Guillaume, shaking his head, "he has not bled at all."

"I dare say not, because the bullet stuck there between flesh and hide in the fat. To-day the wound you see is setting about healing; so the poor beast is itching and has rubbed himself against the third oak on the left of the

Sarrazins well . . . he rubbed and rubbed himself so that a tuft of hair remained behind on the tree bark. Look here!" And François drew out from the pocket of his waistcoat a tuft of hair, which, damp with clotted blood, supported his statement.

Guillaume took it, cast a connoisseur's eye over it, and handing back the tuft of hair as if it had been the most precious thing in the world:

"Faith, yes, my boy, he's there right enough," said he, "and I can as good as see him at this moment."

"Ah, you'll see him better still when we have settled his score."

"You make my mouth water. I've a good mind to go for a stroll in that direction."

"Oh, I'm easy enough in my mind, you'll find everything as I said. As for him he has his den in the great thicket of the Têtes de Salmon. Do not put yourself about for the gentleman; go as close as you like, my gentleman will not budge. His wife is ill and my gentleman *is* a gentleman."

"Well, I *will* go," said old Guillaume with a gesture of resolution, which made him close his teeth tight and shortened the cutty-stem (already short enough) by above an inch more.

"Do you want *Louchonneau*?"

"Why, what for!"

"Well that's true enough. You have eyes; you will look and see; you will seek, and you will find. . . . As for Master Mathieu's namesake, he shall be put into his kennel after he has had a good slice of bread, for he worked to-day like an angel."

"Ah, Mathieu," said old Guillaume, looking sadly at the vagabond who was quietly eating his potatoes at the fireside, "do you hear that? He will tell me what oak a squirrel has climbed, and when a weasel has crossed the road. That's what *you'll* never know."

"Moreover it's what I don't care about knowing or not knowing. What the devil would you have me make of that?"

Guillaume shrugged his shoulders at this heedlessness of

Mathieu's, unintelligible to an old keeper; then he put on his shooting coat, buckled his half-gaiters, took his gun through force of habit and because he would not have known what to do with his right arm if he had not had his gun, gave a friendly handshake to François and set off.

As for this latter, faithful to the promise he had just made to *Louchonneau*, though keeping old Guillaume in his eye as he followed the Têtes de Salmon road, he went to the cupboard, opened it and cut a hunk of black bread of about half a pound, murmuring:

"Oh, the old bloodhound? While I was making my report, his feet were itching. Come, *Louchonneau*, my friend, have a nice crust! Now that you have worked so well, off with you to your kennel; and sharp's the word, my lad!"

Then, going out by the bakehouse door, against the exterior walls of which Master *Louchonneau's* kennel was fixed, he disappeared, followed by this latter—who felt that the crust of bread mitigated the necessity of the return to the kennel—and leaving Mathieu Goguelue alone with his potatoes.

CHAPTER IV

A BIRD OF ILL OMEN

HARDLY had François got out of his sight when Mathieu raised his head and an expression of intelligence which one would have thought his heavy physiognomy incapable of passed like a flash of lightning over his face.

Then he listened to the noise of the steps of the young keeper who was departing, the sound of his voice which was getting fainter, and on tip-toe he moved towards the brandy bottle, watching (thanks to his squint eyes) on one side the door through which old Guillaume had gone out, on the other that through which François had just disappeared.

Then raising the bottle and putting it in the ray of daylight which crossed the house like a golden arrow, in order to see how much liquor had been taken out and consequently how much he might absorb without getting into trouble: "Ah! the old curmudgeon," he exclaimed. "To think he didn't offer me any!" And in order to repair the omission of Père Guillaume, Mathieu put the neck of the bottle to his lips and swallowed rapidly three or four mouthfuls of the fiery beverage, as if it had been the most harmless liquid, and that without uttering either the *hum* of Father Guillaume or the *houch* of François.

Then as the steps of the latter drew near the room, the vagabond went with the same soft step and resumed his seat on the stool in the chimney-nook, beginning to sing with an air of innocence which would have deceived François himself, a song of which the regiment of the Queen's Dragoons who had long been in barracks in the Castle of Villers-Cotterets had left the tradition in the town.

Mathieu had reached the second verse of his song when François reappeared on the threshold of the bakehouse. Doubtless in order to show of how little interest the presence or the absence of François was to him, Mathieu Goguelue was going on with the interminable ditty, and was about to attack the second couplet, but François, stopping in front of him, said: "Halloa! you're singing now, are you?"

"Is singing forbidden?" asked Mathieu. "In that case the Maire should proclaim the fact by sound of trumpet, and there will be no more singing."

"No," answered François, "it's not forbidden, but it will bring me ill luck!"

"Why so?"

"Because when the first bird I hear singing in the morning is a screech-owl, I say to myself, 'bad luck.'"

"That is to say I'm a screech-owl. All right. I'm a screech-owl, am I? Well, well, I'll be anything anybody likes."

And bringing his two hands close together after taking the indispensable precaution of spitting into them, Mathieu

Goguelue uttered a cry which imitated to perfection the sad monotonous cry of the bird of night. François himself shuddered. "Will you hold your noise, you bird of ill omen!" he said.

"Hold my peace?"

"Yes."

"And if I have something to sing to you, what would you say?"

"I should say I have not the time to listen to you. . . . Look here! do me a service instead, will you?"

"Do you a service?"

"Yes, me. Do you think you cannot do anybody a good turn?"

"Oh, yes. . . . What do you want?"

"I want you to hold my gun in front of the fire to dry while I change my gaiters."

"Change your gaiters! So Monsieur François is afraid of catching cold."

"I'm not afraid of catching cold, but I am going to put on my regulation gaiters, for the inspector might come to the hunt and I want him to find me with my full kit. . . . Well! You don't like the idea of drying my gun."

"Neither yours nor anybody else's. . . . May my head be crushed between two stones, like a stinking beast's, if from to-day onward to the day when I shall be shoved into the ground, I ever touch a gun."

"Well, that would not be much loss, seeing how you use it," said François, opening a sort of cupboard which contained a collection of all kinds of gaiters and looking for his leggings amongst those of the Watrin family.

Mathieu followed him with his left eye, while his right eye seemed to be exclusively occupied with his last potato, which he was peeling slowly and clumsily; then he grumbled as he followed him with his eye, "Well, and why should I use it better when I use it for other people? Just let the chance offer for using it for my own benefit, and you'll see I'm no more awkward-handed than yourself!"

"And what will you put your hand to if not to a gun?" asked François, with his foot on a chair and beginning to

buckle his long gaiters on. "I'll put my hand to my wages! Monsieur Watrin had proposed to get me appointed as under-keeper; but as one has to serve His Highness a year, two years, and sometimes three years all for nothing —no, thank you. I'm not on for *that* job. I much prefer to be manservant at the Maire's."

"What! servant at the Maire's! Servant in the house of M. Raisin, the wood-merchant?"

"Yes, just so; in the house of M. Raisin, the Maire, the wood-merchant."

"Oh," said François, buckling his gaiters and with a shrug of his shoulders which showed the contempt he felt for a domestic.

"Are you annoyed?"

"Not I," answered François, "it's all one to me! All I want to know is what's to become of old Pierre in all this business."

"Ecod!" said Mathieu, carelessly. "It seems that he is going to leave."

"Going to leave!" replied François, with a touch of interest concerning the old servant they were talking of.

"Of course, since I am taking his place, he must be going," continued Mathieu.

"But it's impossible," rejoined François, "he has been in the Raisin's house for the last twenty years!"

"All the more reason for another having a look in," said Mathieu with his evil smile.

"Look here, you are a bad fellow, *Louchonneau*," cried François.

"To begin with," answered Mathieu, with that stolid air he knew so well how to put on, "my name is not *Louchonneau*; that is the name of the dog you have just taken to his kennel; it is not mine."

"Yes, you are right," said François; "and when he learned that sometimes you were called by the same name, he objected, poor dog, saying that *he*, the bloodhound of old Watrin, would never dream of trying to get the berth of Monsieur Deviolaine's bloodhound, though of course a Chief Inspector's house is more desirable than a mere head-keeper's, and since he lodged his complaint you may

squint as much as you like, but you are no longer *Louchonneau.*"

"Just think of that! So I am a bad lot in your opinion, eh, François?"

"Yes, in my opinion, and in everybody else's."

"Why?"

"Are you not ashamed to take the bread out of the mouth of a poor old chap like Pierre? He'll be obliged to beg his wife and children's bread."

"Well, you can make him an allowance out of the 500 francs that you get from the administration as deputy-keeper."

"I shall not make him an allowance," answered François, "because with these 500 francs I support my mother, and she comes first. But he will always find at our house, when he chooses to come, a plate of onion soup and a bit of rabbit stew—the keeper's usual dinner. A servant in the Maire's house!" continued François, who had finished fastening on his second gaiter; "how like you to turn servant!"

"Oh, livery for livery," said Mathieu, "I prefer the one which has money in the waistcoat pocket to one which has empty pockets."

"One moment, my friend," cried François, then correcting himself—"No, you are not my friend—our dress is a uniform, not a livery."

"An oak-leaf embroidered on the collar is not much different from a stripe sewn on to the sleeve," said Mathieu with a jerk of his head which established by gesture at the same time as his words the slightness of the distinction he made between them.

"Yes," continued François, who did not want his interlocutor to have the last word; "only when one has the oak-leaf on one's collar one works, whereas with the stripe on the sleeve one does nothing. . . . That's what made you prefer the stripe to the oak-leaf, isn't it, lazybones?"

"It's like enough," answered Mathieu. Then passing suddenly from one idea to another, as if that idea had suddenly presented itself to his mind: "Talking of that, I hear that Catherine is coming back from Paris to-day."

"Who's Catherine?" asked François.

"Catherine—oh, she's just Catherine, old Guillaume's niece, and Monsieur Bernard's cousin, who has finished her apprenticeship as a seamstress and milliner in Paris, and who is going to take the shop of Mademoiselle Rigolot in the *Place de la Fontaine* at Villers-Cotterets."

"Well, and what of that?" asked François.

"Well, if she came back to-day, I should not go away till to-morrow. . . . There will be a jollification here for the return of this mirror of virtue!"

"Listen, Mathieu," said François in a more serious way than he had done till then. "When you speak before others than myself about Mademoiselle Catherine in this house, you must pay attention in whose presence you speak."

"Why so?"

"Because Mademoiselle Catherine is the daughter of Monsieur Guillaume Watrin's own sister."

"Yes, and Monsieur Bernard's sweetheart, is she not?"

"As for that, if you are asked, Mathieu," rejoined François, "I advise you to say that you know nothing about it, do you see?"

"Well, that's your mistake; I'll say what I know—I have seen what I have seen, and heard what I have heard."

"Ah," said François, looking at Mathieu with an expression of disgust, and contempt, so mingled together that it was impossible to say which feeling dominated, "you are quite right to become a flunkey; it was your calling, Mathieu, the spy and informer. . . . Good luck to you in your new calling! If Bernard comes down, tell him I shall await him a hundred paces from here at the rendezvous, that is to say the Stag's Leap, do you hear?"

And flinging his gun over his shoulder with that movement which only belongs to those who have a fully developed habit of wielding that weapon, he went out repeating, "Yes, I won't unsay what I have said. Mathieu, you are a horrid, nasty fellow!"

Mathieu saw him depart and smiled his eternal smile; then when the young keeper had disappeared, that bright light of intelligence which had only gleamed for a moment

before, once more shone out on his brow, and with a voice full of threatening and getting louder as the object threatened got farther away, he exclaimed:

"Ah, you won't unsay what you have said, eh? I am a nasty fellow, am I? I shoot badly, do I? Bernard's dog protested because I was called *Louchonneau* like him, eh? I am a spy, a lazybones, an informer! Oh, patience, patience, patience! The world will not come to an end to-day, and perhaps I shall wipe off that score before the end of the world."

At that moment the planks of the staircase leading to the first floor creaked, a door opened, and a fine, healthy-looking and powerfully-built young man of five and twenty, equipped from head to foot as a ranger, but for the gun, appeared on the threshold. This was Bernard Watrin, the son of the house, who has been mentioned twice or thrice in the preceding chapters.

The accoutrement of the young keeper was irreproachable. His blue coat with silver buttons, closed from top to bottom, showed off a figure admirably moulded; velveteen trousers that fitted tight, and leather gaiters coming above the knee, displayed a thigh and a leg magnificently modelled; lastly his dark yellow hair, and his whiskers of a warmer tint than his hair harmonized perfectly with cheeks from which exposure and sunshine had not been able to take the youthful freshness.

There was something so perfectly sympathetic in the man we have just brought on the scene, that in spite of the firmness of his light blue eyes and the rather hard outline of his chin—the sign of strength of will pushed to the extent of obstinacy, it was impossible not to feel oneself drawn to him.

But Mathieu was not one of those who yield to that sort of attraction. The physical beauty of Bernard which made so complete a contrast with his own ugliness had always caused the vagabond envy and hate, and assuredly if he had had only to wish for a misfortune twice as great to fall on Bernard, he would not have hesitated to wish to lose an eye in order that Bernard should lose both his, or to break a leg in order that Bernard's two legs should be broken.

This feeling was so strong with him that, however he might try to smile at Bernard, he could never manage to smile at him except with the wrong side of his face.

On that day his smile was greener and more vinegary than ever. There was a sort of constrained and impatient joy in that smile—the smile of Caliban at the first peal of thunder that heralded a storm.

Bernard paid no attention to the smile. He on the other hand seemed to have a joyful concert singing of youth and life and love in the depths of his heart.

His look ranged with astonishment, almost with disquietude, around him.

"Halloa," said he, "I thought I heard François' voice. Was he not here a moment ago?"

"Yes, he was here right enough; but he got impatient at waiting for you and went away."

"All right, we shall meet at the rendezvous." And Bernard went to the chimney-piece, unhooked his gun, blew down the barrels to make sure they were empty and clean, primed the two touch-holes, poured a charge of powder into each barrel and extracted from his game-bag a couple of felt wads.

"Halloa," said Mathieu, "you still use stamped-out wads?"

"Yes; I find they press down the powder more evenly. Halloa, what have I done with my knife?"

Bernard felt in all his pockets, but could not find the object he had need of.

"Will you have mine?" asked Mathieu.

"Yes, give it me."

Bernard took the knife, marked two crosses on the bullets and slipped the two bullets into the barrel of his gun.

"What are you doing, Monsieur Bernard?" asked Mathieu.

"I am marking my bullets, in order to be able to recognize them if there is a discussion. When two people fire at the same wild boar, and the wild boar has only one bullet in him, it is just as well to know who killed it."

And Bernard advanced towards the door, Mathieu

following him with his squinting eye; and that eye had at that moment an incredible expression of ferocity in it.

Then, when the young man was all but on the threshold of the door, he exclaimed:

"Monsieur Bernard, just a word. Seeing it is your favourite François who has marked down the boar, you know you will not draw a blank . . . besides, so early in the morning the dogs have no nose."

"Well, what is it you want to say to me?"

"What is it I want to say to you?"

"Yes."

"Is it true that the world's wonder comes to-day?"

"Whom are you talking about?" said Bernard, knitting his brows.

"Why, of Catherine."

Hardly had Mathieu uttered that name, when a vigorous box on the ear resounded through the room. He drew back two paces, without the expression of his countenance changing.

"Halloa, halloa, what's the matter with you this morning, Monsieur Bernard?"

"Nothing," replied the Forester; "only I want to teach you henceforward to pronounce that name with the respect that everybody has for it,—and I especially."

"Oh," said Mathieu, keeping one of his hands on his cheek and rummaging with the other in his pocket; "when you know what is in this paper you will be sorry for that blow you have just given me."

"In that paper?" repeated Bernard.

"Yes."

"Let me see it, then."

"Wait a bit."

"Let me see it, I tell you!" And stepping towards Mathieu he tore the paper out of his hands.

It was a letter having this address:

"To Mademoiselle Catherine Blum,

"*Rue Bourg l'Abbé*, No. 15,

"Paris."

CHAPTER V

CATHERINE BLUM

THE mere touch of the paper, the mere reading of the address, sent a shudder through Bernard's whole body, as if he had divined that this letter enclosed for him a whole period of new existence, a whole series of unknown misfortunes.

The girl to whom the letter was addressed and whom we have already said a few words about, was the daughter of Père Guillaume's sister and consequently first cousin to Bernard.

Now, how came it to pass that this girl had a German name? How had she been brought up by others than her father and mother? How did she find herself at this moment at No. 15, *Rue Bourg l'Abbé*, Paris? That is what we shall proceed to unfold.

In 1808 a column of German prisoners who came from the battlefields of Friedland and Eylau crossed through France, billeting themselves on private individuals as the French soldiers themselves did.

A young Badener, who had been severely wounded at the first of those two battles, found himself billeted at the house of Guillaume Watrin, who had been married for four or five years and in whose house lived Rose Watrin, his sister, a pretty girl of seventeen or eighteen.

The stranger's wound, grave enough at the time he had come out of the ambulance, had been so inflamed by marches, fatigue and want of attention that, on a certificate of the doctor and the surgeon of Villers-Cotterets, Messieurs Lécosse and Raynal, he was obliged to remain in the native town of the narrator of this story.

They wanted to take him to the hospital, but the young soldier showed such a repugnance to this change that Père Guillaume (who at this epoch was simply called Guillaume as he was then a young fellow of from twenty-

eight to thirty) was the first to propose that he should remain at the *Faisanderie*.

This was the name of Guillaume's residence in 1808, situated about quarter of a league at most from the town, under the finest and tallest trees of that part of the forest that is called the Park.

What had above all things inspired Friedrich Blum (that was the name of the wounded man) with this lively repugnance to the hospital was not only the cleanliness of his host and his young wife, the excellent air of the *Faisanderie* and the delicious view from the little room over the garden-plots of the keepers and the green trees of the forest, but also and more especially the sight of that charming flower which one would have thought had been plucked in one of those plots and which was called Rose Watrin.

She on her part, when she saw the young man, so handsome, so pale and so ill, about to be put on the stretcher of the poor and transferred to the hospital, had felt such a painful shock that her heart failed her and she went and entreated her brother with clasped hands and tears in her eyes, not daring to utter a single word, but much more eloquent by her silence than she could have been by the most urgent words in the world.

Watrin had understood all that was going on in his sister's soul, and moved less by the girl's desire than by that deep-seated pity which one is always sure to find in men who live in isolation and solitude, he had consented to the young Badener remaining at the *Faisanderie*. From that moment, by a tacit convention, Watrin's wife had resumed all the cares of her household and of her son Bernard, at that time three years of age; while Rose, the lovely forest flower, had consecrated herself exclusively to the care of the wounded man.

The wound had been made (the reader must pardon the half dozen scientific words which we can hardly avoid using) —the wound had been made, we repeat, by a bullet which had struck the *condyle* of the *femur*, had penetrated through the *aponeurosis* of the *fescia lata* and lodged in the deep layers of flesh in that part, where it had remained and set up violent irritation. At first the surgeon had thought

the thigh-bone was broken and had wished to amputate the limb ; but this operation had terrified the young man, not so much because of the pain involved, as from the idea of lasting mutilation. He declared that he preferred to die ; and as he had to do with French surgeons who did not care much whether he died or not, they left him in the ambulance, where gradually—to use the scientific term again—the bullet had become encysted in the muscular tissues by reason of an aponeurotic secretion.

Meantime the order had come to make the prisoners march to France. The prisoners, wounded or not, had been put on carts and sent off to their destination ; Friedrich Blum like the rest and with the rest. He had travelled two hundred leagues in this way ; but on reaching Villers-Cotterets his sufferings had been so intolerable that he had not been able to go further.

Fortunately what might have been regarded as an aggravation had proved, on the contrary, a beginning of convalescence. The bullet, whether it had been driven by some violent effort or carried by its own weight, had burst through its abnormal envelope and slipped down between the muscles, the interstitial tissue of which it had torn in its descent.

Now, one can understand that this miracle of nature, this strange cure that the body undertakes on its own account, is not performed instantly and without violent pains. The wounded man remained three months stretched on his bed of fever, then gradually a marked improvement declared itself ; he was able to get up and walk, first to the window and then to the door, then go out, then walk about, leaning on Rose Watrin's arm, under the great trees that are close to the *Faisanderie*, and finally one day he felt a foreign body roll between the flexors of his left leg. He summoned a surgeon ; the surgeon made a slight incision and the bullet, which had almost been mortal, fell harmless into the hands of the operator. Friedrich Blum was cured.

But as the result of this cure it turned out that there were two wounded people in the Watrin household instead of one.

Happily the peace of Tilsit occurred. A new kingdom had been created in 1807 ; it took from the ancient duchy of Westphalia the bishopric of Paderborn, Horn and Bielefeld ; it joined to it a portion of the Upper Rhine circles and lower Saxony ; it included moreover the south of Hanover, Hesse-Cassel and the Principalities of Magdeburg and of Verden.

This kingdom was called the kingdom of Westphalia. Remaining in a mythical state so long as the great question which was put to the ordeal of battle was not settled by the victories of Friedland and Eylau, it was recognized by Alexander at the peace of Tilsit and thenceforward among European kingdoms, among which it was only to figure for six years.

One morning Friedrich Blum awoke a Westphalian for good, and consequently an ally of the French instead of their enemy. Then there was a serious question of realizing the idea which had been occupying the minds of the young people for six months, namely that of marrying them. The real difficulty had disappeared ; Guillaume Watrin was too good a Frenchman to give his sister to a man liable to serve against France and fire shots one day against Bernard, whom his father already saw clothed in a uniform and charging the enemies of his country ; but Friedrich Blum having become a Westphalian and consequently a Frenchman, the marriage of the two young folks was the simplest affair in the world.

Friedrich gave his word as a good and brave German to come back within three months, and departed. Many were the tears shed at the leave-taking ; but good faith was so clearly marked on the man's face that his return was never doubted for a moment. He had a project of which he said nothing to anybody, and that was to go and find the new king at Cassel and to present him with a petition in which he recounted all his story and asked for the post of keeper in that forest of eighty leagues long by fifteen broad which stretches from the Rhine to the Danube and which is called the Black Forest.

The plan was simple and straightforward, and succeeded from the very fact of its childish naïveté. One day from

the balcony of the Palace the king saw a soldier who, a paper in his hand, seemed to be soliciting some favour; he was in a kindly humour, as kings always are when on the first step of the throne; instead of sending for the petition he sent for the soldier. This latter declared to him in pretty good French what the petition contained. The king wrote the word "granted" under the report and Friedrich Blum found himself keeper of a district in the Black Forest.

A month's holiday in order to give the new guard the time to go for his betrothed, and an advance of 500 florins to help him make the journey, were joined to the brevet which assured the future of our two young people. Friedrich Blum had asked for three months. He returned at the end of six weeks. This was a proof of his love which spoke for itself and that so loudly that Guillaume Watrin had no objection to offer. But Marianne had, and a serious one. Marianne was a good Catholic who went every Sunday to her Mass at the church of Villers-Cotterets and took the communion at the four great festivals of the year under the direction of the Abbé Grégoire. Now Friedrich Blum was a Protestant and in the eyes of Marianne the soul of Friedrich Blum was inevitably lost, and that of her sister-in-law seriously compromised.

The Abbé Grégoire was summoned.

The Abbé Grégoire was an excellent man, purblind as a mole, as to his bodily eyes; but this external and material short-sightedness had made the sight of his soul only the keener and more piercing. It was impossible to have a juster and truer notion of the things of this world and those of the next than the worthy Abbé had, and no priest, ever since vow of abjuration was pronounced by man, had remained more faithful to his vows.

The Abbé Grégoire replied that there was a religion which should be followed before all and that was the religion of the soul; now the souls of the two young people had made a mutual oath. Friedrich Blum would follow his religion, Rose Watrin hers, the children would be brought up in the religion of the country which they would live in and on the Day of Judgment, God, who is all merciful, would be

satisfied by the separation not of Protestants and Catholics (that was the good Abbé's hope) but merely of the good and the bad.

This decision of the Abbé Grégoire being supported by the two lovers and by Guillaume Watrin, and having three votes in its favour, whereas the contrary proposition, that of Marianne, had only one, it was agreed that the marriage should take place as soon as the religious formalities were accomplished. These formalities took three weeks, after which Rose Watrin and Friedrich Blum were married at the *Mairie* of Villers-Cotterets, in the register of which one can see their names under date of the 12th September, 1809, and also in the church of the same town. The absence of a Protestant pastor caused the marriage in the Protestant church to be deferred till the couple arrived in Westphalia. A month afterwards, exactly, they were married again by the pastor of Verdeck, and all the ceremonies that bound the followers of two different sects together were finally accomplished. Ten months later a child of the female sex was born, which received the name of Catherine, and she was brought up a Protestant, that being the religion of the country in which she was born. Three and a half years of perfect felicity passed for the young couple; then came the campaign of 1812, which brought about the no less fatal campaign of 1813. The "*Grande Armée*" disappeared under the snows of Russia and the ice of the Beresina. A new army had to be raised; every man that had already figured on the lists and every one that was under thirty was summoned to take arms. Friedrich Blum by this decree found himself doubly a soldier, once for having formerly figured on the army list, twice because he was only twenty-nine and four months. He might perhaps have pleaded this reason for exemption to the King of Westphalia that he sometimes suffered cruelly from his old wound; he never thought of doing so. He set out for Cassel, presented himself to the King, was recognized by him, asked to serve as before in the cavalry, commended his wife and child to the Prince, and set off as a brigadier in the Westphalian *chasseurs*. He was among the victors at Lutzen and at Bautzen; among the vanquished and the dead at Leipzig. This time

a Saxon bullet had gone through his breast and he lay down never to rise again among the 60,000 casualties of that day—a day on which 117,000 cannon shots were fired, which was 111,000 more than at Malphaquet—a fine example of the progress that comes with successive centuries!

The King of Westphalia did not forget the promise he had made. A pension of 300 florins was granted to the widow of Friedrich Blum, and reached her amid her grief and her tears; but from the beginning of 1814 the kingdom of Westphalia no longer existed and King Jérome had ceased to count among crowned heads. Friedrich Blum had been killed in the French ranks; in this reactionary epoch it was enough to cause his widow to be looked at askance in this new Germany which had just risen *en masse* against the French; so she set out with the remainder of the French army which was crossing the frontier, and one morning, with her baby in her arms, she came and knocked at her brother Guillaume's door. Mother and child were received by this great-heart as though they were the messengers of God. The little girl—she was three years old—became the sister of Bernard, who was nine; the mother took her place on Blum's bed of suffering in the little room from which one could see the forest gardens. Poor woman, she was more dangerously ill than her husband had been; weariness and sorrow had determined an attack of double pneumonia, which degenerated into pulmonary consumption, and in spite of all the care with which she was tended by her brother and sister-in-law, occasioned her death. So that towards the end of 1814, that is to say at the age of four, little Catherine Blum found herself an orphan. Orphan in name only, of course, for she would have found a father and mother in Watrin and his wife if a father and mother ever could be replaced. But what she did find was a brother in young Bernard, a brother as tender and devoted as if he had had the same father and mother as herself. The two children grew up without being the least disturbed by the political vicissitudes which agitated France, and which twice or thrice put the material existence of their relatives in jeopardy. Napoleon abdicated at Fontainebleau, re-entered Paris a year later, fell a second

time at Waterloo, embarked at Rochefort, was chained up and died on his rock at St. Helena, and yet none of these great catastrophes took anything like the importance in their eyes that history was destined to give them. What was important to this family lost under the thick forest leaves, where the life and death of the great ones of the world roused so feeble an echo, was the fact that the Duke of Orleans, whose apanage the forest of Villers-Cotterets had become, kept Guillaume Watrin on in his position as head-keeper.

This position was preserved for him and had even been improved. On the tragic death of Choron, Watrin had been summoned from the *garderie* of *la Pépinière* to that of Chavigny, and had had to leave his residence the *Faisanderie* for the New House on the Soissons Road. Now 100 francs additional had been assigned to this keeper's place and an increase of 100 francs was a notable improvement in the salary of the old head-ranger.

Bernard for his part had grown up and had been appointed deputy-keeper at eighteen, then keeper with 500 francs on the day he was twenty-one. The result was 1,400 francs united in the same house, which taken along with free lodging and shooting perquisites had brought comfort to the family. Everybody felt the effect of this comfort. Catherine Blum had been sent to school at Villers-Cotterets and had thus received an education which had gradually made a town young lady out of the erstwhile peasant girl. Her beauty had grown along with her education and at sixteen Catherine Blum was one of the most charming girls of Villers-Cotterets and the neighbourhood. It was then that the brotherly love that Bernard had borne all his young life towards Catherine gradually changed its nature and became a lover's love.

However, neither of the two young people had been able clearly to analyse this feeling; each understood that the other was dearer than before as they passed from childhood to adolescence, but neither of them understood the state of their heart until the time when a circumstance happened which proved to them that their existence had only one spring, as two flowers have one stalk.

On her leaving school, that is to say at the age of thirteen or fourteen, Catherine Blum had been apprenticed to Mademoiselle Rigolot, the leading milliner of Villers-Cotterets; she had remained there two years, and had given such proof of intelligence and taste that Mademoiselle Rigolot had declared that if Catherine Blum were to pass a year or eighteen months in Paris in order to acquire the taste of the metropolis, she would not hesitate, even without ready money down, but for 2,000 francs a year for six years, to deliver up her business to her former apprentice in preference to anyone else. This offer was too serious not to rouse grave reflections between Guillaume Watrin and his wife. It was decided that, furnished with a letter from Mademoiselle Rigolot for her Paris correspondent, Catherine should set out from Villers-Cotterets and take up her abode for a year or eighteen months in the capital. The *Rue Bourg l'Abbé* was not perhaps one of the streets where fashion showed her newest and most elegant creations, but it was in *Rue Bourg l'Abbé* that the correspondent of Mademoiselle Rigolot lived, and they trusted in Catherine to correct what might be too old-fashioned in the taste of the inhabitants of this middle-class street.

It was only when Bernard and Catherine had to take leave of one another that they perceived really and truly how far their love had gone, and that this love possessed all the concentration and egoism of that of a lover for his mistress, and none of the loose texture of a brother's affection for a sister.

Promises to think eternally of one another, to write at least three times a week, and to preserve an unshakeable fidelity were exchanged between the two young people, who kept close within their two hearts the secret of their love, of which they themselves perhaps had but a dim idea.

During Catherine's eighteen months of absence, Bernard had enjoyed two holidays of four-and-twenty hours each; these two holidays, due to the special protection of his Inspector, who liked as men and appreciated as servants the two Watrins, were naturally employed by Bernard in making two journeys to Paris, which only united closer the bonds which held the two young folk.

At length the hour of return arrived, and in order to celebrate this return the Inspector had given permission for a wild boar to be killed. It was with this intention that François had got up at three in the morning, headed off the beast, and made his report to old Guillaume, that the latter had gone in person to verify the report, that the keepers of the sub-district of Chavigny, the natural helpers and sworn allies of the inhabitants of the *Maison Neuve*, had arranged a meeting at the *Saut du Cerf*, and that Bernard, dreaming the sweetest dream at the idea of this return, had come down combed, curled, titivated and a glad smile on his face when the letter placed before his eyes by Mathieu Goguelue had suddenly changed this smile into a frown and this joy into disquietude.

CHAPTER VI

THE PARISIAN

AS a matter of fact Bernard had recognized in the address of the letter the writing of a young man called Louis Chollet, the son of a wood-merchant in Paris, who had come to dwell two years before this date in the house of a Monsieur Raisin, the leading timber-merchant of Villers-Cotterets, and at the same time Maire of the town.

He was there learning the practical side of his trade, that is to say he was filling the post of first salesman with Monsieur Raisin; just as in Germany, and more especially on the banks of the Rhine, the sons of the most important hotel-keepers take the position of head-waiters in the establishments of their father's colleagues in other cities.

Chollet senior was very rich, and allowed his son for pocket money 500 francs a month. With 500 francs a month at Villers-Cotterets one can keep a tilbury, a riding horse and a carriage-horse. Moreover, and more especially when one gets one's clothes made in Paris, and one can have one's tailor paid out of the paternal till, one becomes

the king of provincial fashion. That was what had occurred in the case of Louis Chollet. Young, rich, a handsome fellow, accustomed to Parisian life, whose facile amours had given him that notion of women which young men acquire who have never known anything else but *grisettes* or *cocottes*, Chollet had come to think that nothing in petticoats could by any manner of means resist his fascinations.

So on his arrival and on the very first Sunday, thinking that, thanks to his coat cut in the latest fashion, his trousers of a tender and delicate hue, his open-worked shirt and his gold watch with its countless trinkets, he would only have, like another Soliman, to fling his handkerchief, he had presented himself in the dancing saloon, and having made an examination of all the young ladies, had flung the handkerchief to Catherine Blum.

Unfortunately he had met the same rebuff as had three centuries before befallen the illustrious Soldan to whom we have had the honour to compare him ; the handkerchief was not lifted up any more by the modern Roxana than by the Roxana of the middle ages, and the Parisian (such was the nickname with which the new-comer had been baptized) had been labouring in vain.

Moreover, as the Parisian had paid marked attention to Catherine, Catherine had not appeared at the dance on the following Sunday. And this was done in quite a natural way. She had read in Bernard's eyes the disquietude which the assiduity of the budding salesman had caused Bernard, and she had proposed to her cousin to go and pass the next Sunday at the *Maison Neuve* —a proposal that he accepted with enthusiasm—her cousin remaining at home, instead of spending that day at Villers-Cotterets, as he had been accustomed to do ever since Catherine had come to town. But the Parisian had not regarded himself as beaten ; he had ordered shirts from Mademoiselle Rigolot, then handkerchiefs, then collars, and this had given him many occasions of seeing her—occasions on which she displayed the utmost politeness as first saleswoman, and the utmost coldness as a woman. These visits of the Parisian to Mademoiselle Rigolot's—visits

which were obvious in their intent—had much alarmed Bernard. But how to prevent them? The future wood-merchant was the sole and unique judge of the number of shirts, handkerchiefs, and collars that he needed, and if it was his pleasure to have twenty-four dozen shirts, forty-eight dozen handkerchiefs and six hundred collars, that was no business of Bernard Watrin's.

Besides it was his right to order his shirts one by one and his handkerchiefs and his collars one by one, a fact which allowed of entering Mademoiselle Rigolot's shop 365 times a year!

From this number of days however we must subtract the Sundays, not that Mademoiselle Rigolot shut her shop on Sundays, but every Saturday at eight o'clock at night Bernard came for his cousin, whom he brought back every Monday at eight in the morning. And it was noteworthy that the moment this custom was known by the Parisian, the latter had never once had the idea of ordering anything on Sunday from Mademoiselle Rigolot, or so much as inquiring on that day whether the articles ordered by him during the week were ready.

It was during this time that the proposal to send Catherine to Paris had proceeded from Mademoiselle Rigolot—a proposal which, as was said before, had been favourably received by Guillaume and his wife and to which Bernard would have offered much more resistance, had he not considered that the execution of this project put seventy-two kilometres between the detested Louis Chollet and the beloved Catherine Blum.

This idea had so far as Bernard was concerned softened the pain of separation.

But although there was no railway at that epoch, seventy-two kilometres were no hindrance for a lover, more especially when that lover, being an amateur salesman, had no need to ask leave of his employer and possessed 500 francs a month of pocket money.

The result was that for the two journeys that Bernard had made to Paris in the space of eighteen months, Chollet, who was master of his own actions and who cashed every 30th of the month the same sum as poor Bernard pocketed

on the 365th day of the year, the result was, I say, that for these two journeys Chollet made twelve. Another remarkable thing was that ever since Catherine's departure for Paris Chollet had ceased to buy shirts at Mademoiselle Rigolot's, *Place de la Fontaine* at Villers-Cotterets, and bought them in Paris from Madame Cretté and Company, 15, *Rue Bourg l'Abbé*.

Of course Catherine had immediately put Bernard in possession of this knowledge, which had considerable importance for Mademoiselle Rigolot, but much more for him. Now the human heart is so made that though he was sure of the feeling which his cousin had vowed him, this courtship of the Parisian did not fail to alarm him. A score of times he had had the idea of picking a good quarrel with Louis Chollet—one of those differences which are ended by a sword-thrust or a pistol-shot; and as, thanks to his special opportunities of practice, Bernard wielded a pistol in first-class style, and as, thanks to one of his chums who had been fencing master in a line regiment, and who in a neighbourly way had given him as many lessons as he chose to take, he handled the rapier very prettily, the matter pushed to its final consequences would only have moderately disquieted him. But how to pick a quarrel with a man with whom he had had no disagreement; a man who was polite towards everybody and more particularly with him? The thing was impossible.

He had to bide his time. Bernard had bided it for eighteen months and during these eighteen months it had never offered. But now on the very day on which Catherine Blum was to return he was given a letter addressed to the girl and he recognized that the address was written in his rival's hand. One can therefore understand the excitement and paleness which had seized Bernard at the mere sight of this letter. He turned it over and over, as we have said, in his hand, drew out his handkerchief and mopped his brow. Then, as if thinking he might have need once more of his handkerchief, he kept it under his left arm instead of putting it in his pocket and with the air of a man who takes a great resolution he unsealed the letter. Mathieu looked at him doing so with his

wicked smile and, perceiving that he became paler and paler as he read on, he cried:

"Look you, Monsieur Bernard, that is just what I told myself when I took that letter out of Pierre's pocket. . . . I said: 'Well, well, now I must be off and enlighten Monsieur Bernard as to the goings on of this Parisian and at the same time I shall get Pierre dismissed his place,' and so it happened, when Pierre came and said he had lost the letter—the ass, as if he could not have said he had put it in the post, eh? That would have had this advantage, that the Parisian thinking that the first had gone would not have written a second and consequently Mademoiselle Catherine would not have received it, and not having received it would not have answered it!"

At that moment, Bernard, who was reading the letter through for the second time, interrupted himself and shouted: "How do you mean, 'answered,' you wretch! Catherine answered the Parisian's letter?"

"Oh, oh," said Mathieu, protecting his cheek with his hand for fear of a sound box on the ear. "I don't exactly say that."

"What do you say, then?"

"I say that Mademoiselle Catherine is a woman and that sin always tempts a daughter of Eve."

"I ask you positively if Catherine answered, do you understand, Mathieu?"

"Perhaps yes, and perhaps no. But you know, don't you, that silence gives consent."

"Mathieu!" cried the young man, making a threatening gesture.

"In any case he was to have started this morning to meet her with the tilbury."

"Did he start?"

"How do I know," said Mathieu, "since I slept in the bakehouse! But would you like to know?"

"Yes, certainly I should."

"Well. That's easy. If you inquire at Villers-Cotterets of the first person you meet: 'Has Louis Chollet been seen going in the direction of Gondreville with his tilbury?' you will get the answer, yes."

"Yes! Then he has been?"

"Yes and no. I am an imbecile, as you know—I tell you he was to have gone. I don't say he went."

"But how can you know that?" (As a matter of fact the letter had been unsealed and resealed.)

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps the Parisian opened it again to write a P.S."

"So it wasn't you who unsealed the letter and then resealed it?"

"What would have been the use? Can I read? Am I not a brute beast that could never for the life of him learn his A B C?"

"That's true," muttered Bernard; "but tell me, how do you know he was to go and meet her?"

"Oh! he told me, you know; 'Mathieu,' said he, 'we must have the nag dressed down bright and early; I'm off at six o'clock in the morning in the tilbury, to meet Catherine.'"

"Did he say *Catherine* right out, like that?"

"Oh! he made no bones about that, I warrant you."

"Ha!" growled Bernard, "I only wish I'd been there, to hear the brute say it!"

"Yes indeed! you would have given him a clout on the head, as you did me . . . or rather, you wouldn't have,—not you!"

"Why not?"

"Because you shoot straight, that's true enough, but then there are plenty of trees in Monsieur Raisin's wood-yard all pitted with pistol-balls to prove he's not a bad hand neither . . . because you are a tidy swordsman, true for you, but he had a bout the other day with the Sub-Inspector, an old Lifeguardsman, and he gave him a fine dance, they do tell me!"

"So!" cried Bernard, "so you think that would have stopped me, eh?"

"I don't say that, no! but you would have thought twice before you struck the Parisian; he's not like poor Mathieu Goguelue, just as defenceless as a child."

A good-natured impulse, a feeling of compassion and

almost of shame, stirred in Bernard's heart, and holding out his hand to Mathieu,

"Forgive me," he said, "I did wrong."

Mathieu put his chilly, trembling hand in Bernard's.

"And yet . . . and yet . . ." resumed Bernard, "and yet you don't like me, you know you don't, Mathieu!"

"God Almighty!" protested the vagabond, "how *can* you say such a thing, Monsieur Bernard?"

"Not to mention that you tell a lie every time you open your mouth."

"Well, well!" retorted Mathieu, "granted I told a lie . . . What is it to *me*, after all, whether the Parisian is, or is not, Mademoiselle Catherine's sweetheart, and whether he goes to meet her in his tilbury, or whether he doesn't, now that Monsieur Raisin, who does whatever Monsieur Chollet tells him, in hopes the man will marry his daughter Euphrosine, has sent old Pierre about his business, and taken me on in his place? . . . It will be just as well for me, I own freely, if they don't find out it was I who, out of devotion to you, took the letter out of the old chap's pocket. He has a vile temper, has master Pierre, the sly old devil!—and when the hunt is up, why! you know, Monsieur Bernard, we must ware the boar's tushes!"

Bernard, buried in his own thoughts and crumpling the letter meantime between his fingers, nevertheless heard plainly enough what Mathieu was saying, though no one would have supposed so. Suddenly, turning upon him and slapping the letter against his thigh:

"Well, Mathieu, I must say, you are a . . ."

"Oh! out with it, Monsieur Bernard," put in Mathieu, "out with it; it's always bad to keep a thing in!"

"You are a scoundrel!" said Bernard; "get out of the house with you!"

And he took a step towards the vagabond to push him out by main force. But as his way was, Mathieu made no sort of resistance; Bernard's one step in advance he answered by two in the opposite direction.

Then retiring backwards, glancing over his shoulder the while so as not to miss the door.

"Maybe, it would pay you better to thank me differently; but there! it is your way. . . . Every man to his taste, as they say. Till we meet again, Monsieur Bernard! till we meet again . . . !"

Then having finally reached the door, he cried in a tone in which was concentrated all the bitterness of his hatred, old and new alike:

"Do you hear, I say? *Till we meet again!*"

And quickening his gait, usually so slow and heavy, he jumped the ditch dividing the high road from the forest, and diving under the shade of the great trees, disappeared from view.

CHAPTER VII

JEALOUSY

BUT the eye of Bernard, instead of following Mathieu, as he thus retreated with threats and menaces, had already returned to the letter.

"Yes," he muttered, "I quite understand his writing the letter; those Parisians, they stick at nothing. But that she should come back exactly the way he points out or accept a place in his tilbury is what I cannot believe. Ah! *pardieu!* so there you are, François! Welcome! welcome!"

These words were addressed to the young keeper who now opened Père Guillaume's door, as he opened the commencement of the present story.

"Yes, it is I," said he, "Faith, I came to see whether you were not dead of a stroke by now"

"No, not yet," said Bernard, a smile curling his lip.

"Then let us be off," said François. "Bobineau, La Feuille, Lajeunesse and Berthelin are at the Stag's Leap by now, and if Daddy Grumbler finds us here when he comes home, it is we shall catch it worse than the boar."

"Meanwhile come here!" said Bernard.

These words were uttered in a harsh and imperious tone which was so little Bernard's way that François looked at him in wonder. But noting at once the pallor of his face, the disturbance of his countenance and the letter he held in his hand and which seemed to be the cause of the alteration that had taken place in the look and manners of the young man, he came forward, half smiling, half uneasy, and putting his hand to his cap like a soldier saluting his superior officer, said, "Here, sir!"

Bernard, seeing his eyes fixed on the letter, hastily put the hand that held it behind his back, and laying the other on François' shoulder said, "What do you think of the Parisian?"

"The young man who is at M. Raisin, the timber-merchant's?"

"Yes."

François tossed his head and gave an approving click of the tongue.

"I say that he is well dressed, and always in the latest fashion apparently."

"His clothes are not the question."

"His looks, then? Well, he is a good-looking fellow, I cannot say otherwise." And he made a gesture of appreciation.

"I am not speaking of him from the physical point of view," said Bernard impatiently. "I am speaking of his morals."

"His morals?" cried François, showing by his tone of voice that as soon as it was a question of morality his opinion would be totally changed.

"Yes, his morals," repeated Bernard.

"Well," replied François, "I think that in point of morals he would never put himself out to find the trail of Mother Watrin's cow, if she was lost in Meutard meadows. And yet a cow leaves a fine trail behind her."

"Yes, but he is quite good for marking down a doe, putting her up and following her till she is caught, especially if the said pretty doe wears a bonnet and a petticoat!"

François' face at this suggestion assumed an expression of approving jocularity which there was no mistaking.

"Oh, upon my word, he has the name of being a rare sportsman in that line!"

"Be it so," rejoined Bernard, clenching his fist, "but don't let him come trespassing on my land, or let the poacher beware!"

He had spoken these words so menacingly that François glanced at him in alarm.

"Why," said he, "what is the matter?"

"Come nearer," said Bernard.

The young man complied. Bernard put his right arm round his companion's neck, and placing Chollet's letter before his eyes with his left hand asked, "What do you say to that letter?"

François looked first at him, then at the letter, and at last read:

"'Dear Catherine,'—Oh, your cousin, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Bernard.

"Well, it seems to me it would not skin his mouth to call her Mademoiselle Catherine, like other people."

"Yes, to begin with. But wait, you have not finished."

François went on, beginning to understand how matters stood.

"Dear Catherine,—

"I hear that you are coming back after eighteen months' absence, during which I have scarcely seen you in my short excursions to Paris and have not got to speak to you. I need not tell you that during those eighteen months your charming little face has constantly been running in my head, and that I have thought only of you night and day. As I am in a hurry to repeat to you in words what I am here writing, I will go as far as Gondreville to meet you. I hope I shall find you more reasonable on your return than you were when you left, and that the air of Paris will have made you forget that clodhopper, Bernard Watrin.

"Your adorer till death,

"Louis Chollet"

" Oh," commented François, " he wrote that, did he, the Parisian ? "

" Unfortunately he did . . . 'That clodhopper, Bernard Watrin.' You see."

" Ah ! well . . . and Mademoiselle Catherine ? "

" Yes, as you say, François,—and Mademoiselle Catherine ? "

" Do you think he has gone to meet her ? "

" Why not ? These townspeople stop at nothing. And besides, why trouble about a clodhopper like me ? "

" But now to come to you."

" Me ! Go on."

" Bless my soul, you know how you stand with Mademoiselle Catherine, I suppose."

" I knew before she went away, but after her being eighteen months at Paris, who can tell ? "

" But you have been to see her ? "

" Twice ; and I have not seen her for eight months. In that time all sorts of things will happen in a young girl's mind."

" Come, come, for shame, that's a wicked notion ! " cried François. " Well now, I know Mademoiselle Catherine, and will answer for her."

" François, François, the best woman is, if not false, at least a coquette. Those eighteen months at Paris —— Ah ! "

" And I tell you that you will find her come back, as she went away, a good girl and a kind one."

" Oh, but if she goes driving in his tilbury, look you ! " cried Bernard with a fierce and angry gesture.

" Well, what ? " asked François in affright.

" These two bullets," he replied, drawing from his pocket the two on which he had made a cross with Mathieu's knife, " these two bullets with my sign-manual which I put on them for the benefit of the boar . . ."

" Well ? "

" Well, there would be one of them for him and the other for me."

He dropped them into the barrels of his gun and securing them with two wads cried, " Come, François."

"Oh, Bernard, Bernard!" said the young man, bracing himself to resist.

"I tell you to come, François," cried he vehemently. "Come along."

And he dragged him along, but stopped suddenly, for between him and the door he found his mother.

"Mother!" he murmured.

"Good! The old lady," said François, rubbing his hands, for he hoped the mother's presence would make some difference in Bernard's terrible intentions.

The old woman came in with a smiling face, carrying a cup of coffee on a plate with the usual accompaniment of two pieces of toast. She had only to glance at her son to realize with a mother's instinct that something unusual was happening to him.

However she did not let it show, but said with her usual smile, "A very good day to you, my child."

"Many thanks, mother."

He made as if to leave the room, but she held him back.

"How did you sleep, boy?" she asked.

"Splendidly."

Then seeing him still making for the door, "Are you going already?" she said.

"They are waiting for me yonder at the Stag's Leap and François has come to fetch me."

"Oh, there is no hurry," said the latter, "they must wait. Ten minutes more or less can make no difference."

But Bernard kept moving forward.

"One moment," said Mother Watrin, "I have scarcely said good day to you, and have not kissed you." Then, glancing at the sky, "One would say it was dark weather to-day."

"Bah, it will clear up," said Bernard. "Good-bye, mother."

"Wait!"

"What?"

"Do take something before going out." And she offered the young man the cup of coffee she had just got ready for herself.

"Thank you, mother, I am not hungry," said he.

"It is that nice coffee you like so much, and Catherine too," persisted the old woman. "Come, drink it up!"

Bernard shook his head.

"No? Well, put your lips to it at any rate. It will seem better to me when you have tasted it."

"Dear mother!" he murmured.

And taking the cup he dipped his lips in it, and put it back on the plate, saying "Thank you."

"Anyone would say you were shaking, Bernard," exclaimed the old woman, more and more uneasy.

"No, on the contrary, my hand has never been so steady. Only look."

And with a gesture common among sportsmen he threw his gun from his right hand into his left.

Then, as if to break the chain which he was beginning to feel about him, "Come, come," he said, "good-bye! this time, mother, I must be off."

"Well then, go, since you really must, but come back soon. You know Catherine will be here this morning."

"Yes, I know," said the young man in a tone impossible to reproduce. "Come, François!" and Bernard sprang forward to go out, but on the very threshold of the door he met Guillaume.

"Good, here's my father now," cried he, falling back a step.

Père Guillaume came back, as he had left, with his pipe in his mouth, only his little grey eyes shone with evident satisfaction. He did not even see Bernard, or made believe not to see him, and spoke to François.

"Bravo, lad, bravo! You know I cannot pay compliments, don't you?"

"No, far from it!" rejoined François truly, too much preoccupied as he was to repress a smile.

"Well!" repeated the old keeper. "bravo!"

"Oh!" cried François, "all is as I told you, then?"

"All."

Bernard again made as if to go out, taking advantage

of his father apparently not noticing him, but François stopped him.

"See now, listen a moment, Bernard. It is about the boar."

"The boars, you mean," corrected Guillaume.

"Yes."

"Well, they are all there, as you said, in the Têtes de Salmon covert lying side by side, the sow big to bursting, the boar wounded in the shoulder; a six-year-old—one might think you had weighed him. I saw both as plain as I see you, you and Bernard. If I had not been afraid the others would have said, 'Oh, so that's all you disturbed us for, is it, eh, Father Guillaume?' my word! I would have settled their business for them there and then, I would."

"So," said Bernard, "you see very well that no time must be lost; good-bye, father."

"My boy," said his mother, "do not run into danger, whatever you do!"

The old keeper looked at his wife with that silent laugh which seemed unable to make its way between his set teeth.

"Right!" he said, "if you want to go and kill the boar instead of him, mother, he can stay here and do the cooking."

Then turning round and putting his gun in the chimney-corner, with a shrug of the shoulders peculiar to him, he added, "If that is not enough to make you sweat, from a forester's wife!"

Bernard meanwhile had gone close up to François. "François," he said, "you will excuse me to the others, won't you?"

"Why?"

"Because at the first turning, I am going to leave you."

"You don't say so!"

"You are going to the Têtes de Salmon thicket, the rest of you."

"Yes."

"Well, I am going to the heath of Gondreville. Each to his own quarry."

"Bernard!" cried François, seizing the young man by the arm.

"Come, that's enough, I am of age, and at liberty to do what I like."

Then, feeling a hand weighing on his shoulder, and seeing that it was Guillaume's, he asked, "What is it, father?"

"Is your gun loaded?"

"Rather!"

"With ball, as a good marksman's should be?"

"Yes."

"Then you understand, behind the shoulder?"

"I know the spot, thank you," replied Bernard. And holding out his hand to the old forester he added, "A shake of the hand, father?" Then moving towards Marianne, "And you, mother, embrace me."

Then after clasping the good woman in his arms he cried, "Good-bye, good-bye!" And he darted out of the house while Guillaume, looking at his wife, asked somewhat uneasily, "Tell me, mother, what is the matter with your son this morning? He seems to me quite queer."

"And so he does to me," cried the good woman eagerly. "You ought to call him back, father!"

"Bah! What for?" was the reply. "To know whether he has had bad dreams?" Then going to the doorway with his pipe in his mouth and his hands in his pockets he called after him, "Hi, Bernard! You understand; behind the shoulder!"

But Bernard had abruptly left François, who was pursuing his way to the Stag's Leap by himself.

Nevertheless a voice which was unmistakeably the young man's answered, ringing over the intervening space with a sinister tone that made the old man shudder. "Yes, father, we know, thank God, where to plant a bullet, don't we? Never fear!"

"God protect the poor lad!" murmured Marianne, crossing herself.

CHAPTER VIII

FATHER AND MOTHER

THUS left alone, Guillaume and Marianne looked at each other. Then speaking to himself as if under the circumstances the presence of his wife could throw no light on the question he was putting to himself, he asked, "What the devil is Bernard going to do town-way?"

"Town-way!" cried Marianne; "is he going towards town?"

"Yes. He has gone the shortest way too, that is to say, instead of keeping to the road he has cut across the forest."

"Across the forest? Are you sure?"

"Certainly. There are the others going into the glade at Houchard Bottom and Bernard is not with them. Hi, you others!"

And Father Guillaume moved, half to call the foresters to him, half to go to them himself, but his wife stopped him.

"Stay, father," she said. "I want to talk to you."

Guillaume looked at her sideways. She nodded affirmatively.

"Why," cried he, "if one was to listen to you, you have always something to say. Only what one wants to know is whether what you have to say is worth hearing."

And he again made as if to go out and ask of François or one of his companions the reason Bernard had left them. But Marianne stopped him again.

"Here, stay," said she, "since I tell you to!"

Guillaume stayed, but with obvious impatience. "See now," he said, "what do you want with me? Out with it, quick."

"Have a little patience! You'd have folks finish before they begin, you would."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. You begin with *Louchonneau* and you end up with the Grand Turk."

"Well, this time I will begin and end with Bernard. Does that satisfy you?"

"Go on, anyway," he replied, folding his arms with an air of resignation, "and I will tell you afterwards."

"Well, look here. You said yourself that Bernard has gone towards the town?"

"Yes."

"And that he has cut across the forest as the nearest way?"

"What then?"

"And in fact that he has not gone up with the others towards the Têtes de Salmon?"

"Yes. Well, do you know where he is gone? If you do, tell me and let's have an end of it. You see I am listening. If you don't know, there's no occasion to keep me waiting here."

"You will observe that it is you who are talking now, and not I."

"I won't say another word," retorted Guillaume.

"Well, then," went on the mother, "he went to town. . . ."

"To meet Catherine the quicker. Sly dog! If that's your news, keep it for last year's almanack."

"Where you make the mistake is that he did not go that way to meet Catherine the sooner."

"Oh! and who did he go to town after?"

"He went after Mademoiselle Euphrosine."

"The daughter of the wood-merchant, the Maire's daughter, M. Raisin's daughter? That's all right."

"Yes, for the wood-merchant's daughter, the Maire's daughter, M. Raisin's daughter."

"Hold your tongue."

"Why so?"

"Hold your tongue!"

"Well . . ."

"Hold your tongue, I tell you!"

"Oh, I never saw such a man!" cried she, lifting her

hands to heaven in desperation. "Never right! I do a thing this way and I am wrong. I do it in another way and I am wrong. If I speak, 'silence!' I should not have spoken. If I hold my tongue, why I ought to have spoken. Why in the Lord's name what is one's tongue for if not to say what one has on one's mind?"

"Why, it seems to me," retorted Père Guillaume, looking slyly at his wife, "that you let it run pretty freely, your tongue."

Then as if he had learnt what he wanted to know, he proceeded to fill his pipe, whistling softly a little hunting tune the while as a polite hint to his wife to let their talk end there.

But Marianne was not so easily beaten. "Well now," she went on, "what if I told you that it was the girl herself who was the first to tell me about it?"

"When?" asked Guillaume laconically.

"Last Sunday, coming out from Mass."

"What did she say to you?"

"She said . . . do you mean to listen, yes or no?"

"Eh? I am listening."

"She said to me, 'Do you know, Madame Watrin, that M. Bernard is a very enterprising young man?'"

"What, Bernard?"

"I am telling you what she said. 'When I go by, he looks at me—oh well, if I had not a fan, I should not know which way to look.'"

"Did she tell you that Bernard had spoken to her?"

"No, she did not say that."

"Well?"

"Wait a bit. Lord, what a hurry you are in! 'Well,' she went on, 'Madame Watrin, we shall come and see you one day with my brother. But try and let M. Bernard not be there, I should feel too awkward, for my part. I find him very nice, your son.'"

"Aye," said Guillaume, shrugging his shoulders, "and that pleases you, eh? That flattered your vanity for a pretty young lady in town, the Maire's daughter, to tell you she thought Bernard a good-looking fellow?"

"Why, of course."

" And then you lost your head, and your imagination made all sorts of plans on the strength of it."

" Why not ? "

" And you saw your Bernard the Maire's son-in-law ? "

" Faith, if he married his daughter. . . ."

" Why," cried Guillaume, taking off his cap with one hand and grasping a handful of his grey hair with the other, as if he meant to tear it out: " Why, look you, I have known woodcock, geese, cranes, with more sense than you have. Oh my God, but it hurts a man to hear such things ! But I must. There, there, as it's my fate, I've got to put up with it."

" But what," went on the mother, just as if Guillaume had not spoken, " what if I were to tell you besides that M. Raisin himself stopped me no longer ago than yesterday, as I was coming back from my marketing and said to me, ' Madame Watrin, I have heard of your game stew and I shall come in one day without ceremony and take pot luck with you and father Guillaume ' ? "

" What, don't you see the meaning of all that ? " cried the old man, puffing at his pipe as his way was when he was getting angry, and beginning to disappear like Jupiter Tonans in a cloud.

" No," replied Marianne, not realizing that anyone could see anything in the words she had repeated except what was on the surface.

" Well, I am going to explain it to you."

And as the explanation was to be a long one, Father Guillaume, as he did on all solemn occasions, took his pipe from his mouth, put his hand behind his back, and with his teeth more tightly set than usual began:

" He is a sly fellow, look you, the Maire, half Norman, half Picard, with just enough honesty not to be hanged. Well, he hopes that if his daughter talks to you about your son, and if he talks about your game stews himself, you will pull my woollen cap down over my eyes, so that if he cuts down a beech or fells an oak that isn't just on his land, I shall pay no heed to it. Oh, none of that, Monsieur le Maire ! Cut the hay of your township to feed your horses, that is no concern of mine ; you may pay me as many

compliments as you like, but you will not cut a log more on your plot than has been sold you."

Though not beaten Marianne shook her head in a way which meant that there might after all be some truth in what her old man was saying.

"As you like, let us say no more about it then," she said with a sigh, "but at any rate you will not deny that the Parisian is in love with Catherine?"

"There now!" cried he, making as if to break his pipe against the floor, "here we are out of the frying-pan into the fire!"

"Why so?" asked the old woman.

"Have you done?"

"No."

"Well," said Guillaume, putting his hand into his fob, "I will give a crown for what you have to say—on condition that you will not say it."

"Why, have you anything against him?"

He drew the coin mentioned from his pocket.

"Is it a bargain?" he asked.

"A good-looking fellow!" went on the old woman with that obstinacy of which François, when drinking her health, had wished she might be cured.

"Too good-looking by half!" rejoined he.

"Rich!" insisted Marianne.

"Too rich!"

"Gallant!"

"Too gallant, by God, too gallant! It might cost him the tips of his ears, not to say the whole of them, that gallantry of his."

"I don't understand you."

"No matter, that is nothing to me. As long as I understand, that's enough for me."

"Admit at any rate," said Marianne, turning round, "that it would be a good match for Catherine."

"For Catherine?" cried the father. "In the first place nothing is too good for Catherine."

The old lady shook her head almost scornfully.

"Yet she is not very easy to get rid of!"

"Good, now you are going to say she is not handsome."

"Jesus!" cried the mother, "she is as handsome as the day."

"Then is she not well-behaved?"

"The Holy Virgin is not purer than she."

"She is not rich, then?"

"Save us, with Bernard's good leave, she will have the half of what we have."

"Oh," said Guillaume, laughing his noiseless laugh, "make yourself easy about that, Bernard will not refuse his consent."

"But," said she, shaking her head, "that is not all."

"What is it then, now?"

"It is a question of religion," said Marianne with a sigh.

"Oh yes, because Catherine is a Protestant like her father. Always the same tale!"

"Lord, there are not many people who like to see a heretic come into their family."

"A heretic such as Catherine? Well, then, I am just the contrary of others. I thank God every morning that she belongs to ours."

"There is no difference between heretics!" went on Marianne with a conviction that would have done credit to a theologian of the sixteenth century.

"Ah; you are sure of that, are you?"

"In his last sermon, which I heard, my Lord Bishop of Soissons said that all heretics were damned."

"Bah, I care as little for what the Bishop of Soissons says as I do for the ashes of this tobacco," rejoined Guillaume, tapping his short pipe against his thumb-nail to empty it. "Did not Père Grégoire tell us, not in his last sermon only but in every one of 'em, that good people are all chosen?"

"Yes," rejoined the old woman obstinately, "but the Bishop must know more about it than he, since he is a Bishop, and the other is only a plain *Abbé*."

"Ah!" said Guillaume, who meanwhile had emptied and refilled his pipe and seemed to want to smoke it in peace, "have you said all you had to say?"

"Yes, though that does not prevent me from loving Catherine, do you see?"

"I know it."

" Like my own daughter."

" I do not doubt it."

" And anyone who came and spoke ill of her to me or tried to do her the least annoyance in the world, would meet with little good at my hands."

" Bravo ! And now a bit of advice, mother."

" What is it ? "

" You have talked enough."

" *I* have ? "

" Yes, to my thinking. So do not talk any more, unless I ask you a question, or by all I hold sacred . . ."

" It is just because I love Catherine just as I love Bernard that I have done what I have," went on the old woman, who seemed like Mademoiselle de Sévigné to have kept for her postscript the most interesting thing she had to say.

" Oh, deuce take me ! " cried Guillaume, almost frightened, " now you are not content to speak, you have acted too. Well, let us see what you have done."

And replacing his pipe, unlit but crammed to the muzzle, in the dental arch which served him for pincers, he crossed his arms and waited.

" Because, if Bernard could marry Mademoiselle Euphrosine, and the Parisian Catherine . . ." resumed the old lady, then breaking off with an oratorical skill of which one would not have thought her capable, leaving the meaning still in suspense.

" Come, what have you done ? " asked Guillaume, who seemed determined not to let himself be surprised by tricks of language.

" That day," she ended, " Father Guillaume would have to own that I am not just a booby, a wild goose, a crane."

" Oh, as for that I own it at once ; all these are birds of passage, whereas you have driven me wild for twenty-six years, spring, summer, autumn and winter. Come, out with it ! What have you done ? "

" I said to the Maire, when he complimented me on my game stew, ' Well, Mr. Maire, to-morrow is a double holiday at our house, first for the fête of Corcy, which parish we belong to, and then to celebrate the home-coming of my niece Catherine. So do you come and eat a dish of stew

at our house along with Mademoiselle Euphrosine and Monsieur Louis Chollet, and after dinner, well, if it is fine, we will all go together and take a turn round the fair."

"And he accepted, did he not?" cried her lord and master with a grinding of the jaws that made the stem of his cutty pipe crack and curtailed another good inch.

"Without any pride."

"Oh, you old stork!" cried the head-keeper desperately. "She knows that I do not want to see her Maire; she knows that I cannot bear her sanctimonious Euphrosine; she knows that I can wind her Parisian a league off! And she asks them to dine with me! And when? On a holiday."

"Anyhow," said the old woman, vastly relieved at having confessed the misdeed which weighed upon her mind, "they are asked."

"Yes, they are asked!" said he furiously. "And we cannot put them off, eh?"

"No, unfortunately. But I know some one who will digest his dinner badly, or rather not digest it at all."

"Good-bye!"

"Where are you going?" cried she.

"I heard François' gun; I am going to see if the boar is dead."

"Father!" cried Marianne, with a look of entreaty.

"Nonsense."

"If I have done wrong . . ." And the poor woman clasped her hands.

"You have."

"Forgive me, Guillaume, I acted with a good intention."

"A good intention?"

"Yes."

"Good intentions! Why, Hell is paved with them!"

"Do listen!"

"Let me alone, or . . ." And he raised his hand.

"Oh," cried Marianne, quite determined, "that does not matter at all. I do not mean you to go out like that; I do not want you to leave me in anger. At your age, when people part, Lord knows if they will ever meet again."

And two big tears rolled down her cheeks. Guillaume saw them. Tears were rare in the old forester's house.

He shrugged his shoulders and moving a step towards his wife said, " Anger ! what nonsense ! I am angry with the Maire and not with my old woman."

" Ah ! " cried she.

" See now, kiss me," he went on, pressing his wife to his breast, but raising his head so as not to endanger his pipe.

" All the same," murmured she, satisfied at bottom, but not sorry to hold forth a little about details, " you called me old stork ! "

" Well, what of it ? Is not the stork a bird of good omen ? Does she not bring luck to the houses where she makes her nest ? Well, you made your nest in this house, and you bring luck to it. That is what I meant."

" Here, what is that ? "

Sure enough the noise of a carriage leaving the paved road and proceeding to pull up at the door of the *Maison Neuve* caught the ear of the old forester at the same time that a young and blithe voice called out, " Father Guillaume ! Mammy Marianne ! It's I, here I am ! "

And at these words a pretty girl of nineteen jumped down from the step of the carriage and alighted at the threshold of the house.

" Catherine ! " cried the head-keeper and his wife in a breath, coming forward to the new-comer with open arms.

CHAPTER IX

THE HOME-COMING

IT was indeed Catherine Blum back from Paris. As we have just said, she was a pretty girl of nineteen, slender and supple as a reed, with that look of charming soft gentleness we associate with German maidenhood impressed on her whole person. Her fair hair, her blue eyes, her red lips, her white teeth, her velvet cheeks made her one of those nymphs of the woods that the Greeks called Glycera or Aglaë.

Of the two pairs of arms opened to receive her the one she chose first was Père Guillaume's; no doubt she knew that there lay the most entire sympathy with her.

Then Marianne was hugged in her turn. While the girl was embracing her adopted mother, Père Guillaume was looking about him. It seemed impossible to him that Bernard should not be there, since Catherine was.

For the first few moments nothing was heard but those broken words which escape from people who are really moved. But almost immediately other voices, mingled with blasts of triumph, became audible; it was François and his companions coming back from their victory over the new Calydonian Boar.

The old forester hesitated for a moment between the desire to embrace his niece again and ask her news, and his curiosity to see the animal, the shouts and the fanfares not permitting him to doubt that the latter was on its way to the pickling-tub. But just at the moment when he was inclining towards the boar, the hunters appeared on the threshold, and came in carrying the beast suspended from a pole by the four feet tied together.

This apparition made a momentary diversion from the reception of Catherine in the case both of Guillaume and Marianne, while on the other hand at the sight of the girl, the sportsmen gave vent to a cheer in her honour.

But it must be owned when the first moment of curiosity was past and Guillaume had examined the old and the new wound and congratulated François, who at sixty yards had bowled over the old boar like a rabbit; and when lastly he had advised them to put aside the harslet, and asked each keeper to take a part of the animal in fair proportion, all the attention of the head-keeper was given once more to the new arrival.

For his part, François delighted once more to see Catherine, whom he heartily liked, and above all to see her smiling, a sure proof that nothing unpleasant had happened—for his part, I say, François declared that he had done enough for the company in killing the boar and that in order to devote all his time to Mademoiselle Catherine, he left to his comrades the work of cutting up the carcase.

The consequence was that the conversation which had scarcely begun at Catherine's arrival, broke out ten minutes later with a volubility that was rendered more noisy by the curiosity that had accumulated during those ten minutes.

For the rest it was Père Guillaume who first introduced a little order into the questioning. He saw that Catherine had arrived not by the high road but by the Fleury track.

"How do you get here so soon and by the way from La Ferté-Milon, my child?" he asked.

François pricked up his ears at the question; it taught him something that he did not know, namely that Catherine had not come by the Gondreville road.

"Yes," echoed Marianne, "how do you come that way and at six in the morning instead of ten?"

"I am going to tell you, dear father, and you, dear mother," answered the girl. "It was because, instead of taking the Villers-Cotterets coach, I came by the Meaux and La Ferté one, which leaves Paris at five instead of ten like the other."

"Ah, that's right," muttered François, with obvious satisfaction; "the Parisian will have had his tilbury out for nothing."

"And why did you take that route?" asked Guillaume, who could not understand that anyone should leave a straight line for a crooked one or go four leagues farther without being obliged to.

"Why," answered Catherine, blushing at her falsehood, harmless as it was, "because there was no room in the other coach."

"Yes," remarked François in an undertone, "and Bernard will thank you for the thought, you angel of God!"

"Why, look at her!" cried Mother Watrin, passing from the general question to details, "she has grown a whole head."

"And why not a neck as well?" said Guillaume, shrugging his shoulders.

"Oh, as for that," persisted the old woman, with that obstinacy which was engrained in her nature and which

she applied to small things as well as great, "it is very easy to verify: when she went away I measured her—the mark is on the jamb of the door. Look, there it is! I used to look at it every day. Come and see, Catherine."

"We have not forgotten the poor old man, then?" said Guillaume, keeping Catherine back to embrace her.

"Oh, can you ask that, dear father?" cried she.

"But come, do, and see the mark, Catherine," insisted the old woman.

"Here!" cried he, stamping his foot, "will you be quiet there with your nonsense?"

"Ah, well, yes," muttered François, who knew the old woman by heart, "see that she holds her tongue."

"Have I really grown so much?" asked Catherine of the father.

"Come to the door and you will see," cried the mother.

"Obstinate she-devil!" cried the old keeper, "she will not let go. Here now, go to the door, Catherine, or we shall have no peace all day."

She went with a smile and put herself against the mark, which disappeared behind the upper part of her head.

"There, I told you so," cried the old dame, triumphantly, "more than an inch."

"That does not quite make a head, but no matter."

And as Catherine, glad to have satisfied her aunt, went back to beside Guillaume, the latter asked, "So you travelled all night?"

"All night, yes, father."

"Why, in that case," cried Marianne, "poor child, you must be broken down with fatigue, you must be starving! What would you like? Coffee, wine, broth? Why, coffee would be best. I will go and make it for you myself. That's right."

Here she fumbled in all her pockets.

"Where are my keys, eh? Now I don't know what I have done with them. Here are my keys lost. Where can I have put them? Wait, wait!"

"But I tell you, mother dear, I want nothing."

"Want nothing after spending a night in a coach and a fly? Oh, if I only knew where my keys are!"

And she turned her pockets out in a sort of frenzy.

"But there is no occasion," said Catherine.

"Why, here are my keys," cried Marianne. "No occasion? I know more about that than you, maybe; when you travel, and that at night, in the morning you want to refresh yourself. Night is a friend to nobody. And besides the nights are always cool. And nothing warm yet in your stomach at eight in the morning. You shall have your coffee directly, child, that you shall."

And the good old dame went out at a run.

"At last!" said Guillaume, looking after her. "Egad, she has a fine mill to grind your coffee with, the mother has, and she grinds her words with it into the bargain!"

"Oh, my dear, good little daddy!" cried Catherine, giving free play to her affection for the old forester without further fear of exciting the jealousy of his wife. "Just fancy, that stupid postilion spoiled all my pleasure by going at a walk, and taking three hours to come from La Ferté here!"

"And what pleasure then was it you planned to do yourself, or rather us, little one?"

"I wanted to get here at six in the morning, go into the kitchen without saying a word to anybody, and then, when you called 'Wife, my breakfast!' it would have been I who brought it in to you and said as I used to in the old days, 'Here it is, dear father.'"

"Oh, you wanted to do that, you sweet, good child, did you," said Father Guillaume. "Let me hug you as if you had done it. Oh, the wretch of a postilion! You must not give him any pourboire!"

"I said the same, but unfortunately it is done."

"How done?"

"Why, when I saw the dear home of my youth showing white all along the road, I forgot everything; I pulled five francs out of my pocket and said to the driver, 'Here, this is for you, my friend, and God bless you.'"

"Dear child, dear child, dear child!" cried Guillaume.

"Now tell me, father," said Catherine, who since her arrival had been looking for some one and had not the heart

to content herself any longer with this silent and fruitless search.

"Yes, isn't it so?" asked he, understanding the reason of the girl's uneasiness.

"It seems to me . . ." murmured she.

"That the one who ought to have been here before all the others has kept away!" completed the old man.

"Bernard!"

"Yes, but do not be alarmed, he was here just now and cannot be far. I am going to hurry as far as the Stag's Leap: from there I can see half a league down the road, and if I catch sight of him I will signal to him."

"Then you do not know where he is now?"

"No, but if he is within a quarter of a league round about, he will know my way of calling him."

And the old man, who could not understand any more than she why Bernard was not there, left the house and at his best speed, as he had said, proceeded towards the Stag's Leap.

Left alone with François, Catherine went nearer to the young man who, as we have seen, had remained all but silent during the preceding scene and looking at him in a way to read his heart to the bottom if he tried to hide anything from her, asked, "And you, François, do you know where he is?"

"Yes," answered he with both lips and head.

"Well, where is he?"

"On the road to Gondreville," he replied.

"On the road to Gondreville? My God!"

"Yes," he went on, emphasizing his words to give them all the significance they really had, "he went to meet you."

"My God!" said Catherine again with increasing emotion, "I thank you, it is you who prompted me to come home by La Ferté and not by Villers-Cotterets."

"Hush, here is mother coming back. Good, she has forgotten the sugar."

"So much the better," cried the girl.

Then, glancing at Mother Watrin who, after setting down her coffee on the walnut dresser, was making off rapidly, as François had said, to look for the sugar, she went nearer

the young man and taking his hand said, " François, my friend, a favour ! "

" A favour ? Ten, twenty, thirty, forty ! At your orders, night as well as day."

" Well, then, my dear François, go and meet him and warn him that I have come, and by the La Ferté road."

" Is that all ? " cried he.

And he started to leave the house at a run by the door towards the highway. But Catherine stopped him with a smile. " No, not that way ! " said she.

" You are right and I am a fool. If Father Grumbler saw me he would ask ' where are you going ? ' "

And instead of going out at that door he jumped out of the window that looked on the forest. It was time ; Marianne was coming in again with the sugar.

" Ah ! " said he, " just in time, there's the mother." And making a last sign to Catherine before disappearing among the trees, added, " Don't be afraid, Mademoiselle Catherine, I will bring him back to you."

Sure enough Madame Watrin came in again, sugared Catherine's coffee as she would have done for a child, and handing it to her said, " Here, take your coffee. Wait, perhaps it is too hot ; I will blow on it."

" Thank you, little mother ! " said the girl smiling as she took the cup. " I assure you that since I left you last, I have learned to blow on my coffee myself."

Marianne looked at her with an affection mingled with admiration, folding her hands and nodding her head gaily. Then after a moment's contemplation : " Were you very sorry to say good-bye to the great city ? "

" Oh, Lord, no ! I know no one there."

" What, do you not miss the handsome gentlemen, the fine sights, the fashionable promenades ? "

" I regretted nothing, mother."

" Did you care for nobody there ? "

" Where ? "

" In Paris."

" In Paris ? No, nobody."

" So much the better ! " said the old woman, following up her idea, which had been so ill received an hour before

by Guillaume. "For I have an idea myself for getting you settled."

"Getting me settled?"

"Yes, Bernard, you know."

"Oh, dear good mother," cried she joyously, deceived by this beginning.

"Well, Bernard . . ."

"Bernard?" echoed the girl, beginning to be alarmed.

"Well," went on the mother confidentially. "Bernard is in love with Mademoiselle Euphrosine."

Catherine uttered a cry and turning frightfully pale stammered in a shaking voice, "Bernard, Bernard in love with Mademoiselle Euphrosine? Gracious Heavens, what is this you tell me, little mother?"

And laying on the table her cup of coffee which she had barely touched she fell back on a chair.

When Mother Watrin was following upon an idea she had the deliberate short-sightedness of obstinate folks, that is she saw nothing but her idea.

"Yes," she went on, "Bernard loves Mademoiselle Euphrosine, and she loves him too, so much so that he has only to say 'I agree' and the matter will be settled."

Catherine sighed and passed her handkerchief over her brow, which was wet with perspiration.

"Only," added the mother, "my old man does not wish it."

"Oh, really?" murmured Catherine, to some extent recovering her self-possession.

"Yes, he declares that it is not true, that I am as blind as a mole, and that Bernard does not care an atom for Mademoiselle Euphrosine."

"Oh!" ejaculated Catherine, breathing a little more freely.

"Yes, he declares so—he says he is sure of it."

"My dear uncle," murmured Catherine.

"But here you are, thank the Lord, my child, and you will help me to persuade him."

"I?"

"And when you marry," went on the mother by way of

advice, " always endeavour to keep up your authority over your husband, or else the same fate will happen to you as has befallen me."

" And what is that ? "

" I mean, you will cease to count for anything in the house."

" Mother," cried Catherine, raising her eyes heavenwards with an ineffable aspect of devotion, " at the end of my life I shall say that God has loaded me with benefits if He has given me such a life as yours."

" Oh ! oh ! "

" Never, never complain. Heavens ! my uncle loves you so well and truly."

" To be sure he loves me," replied the old dame awkwardly, " but . . ."

" No buts, my dear aunt ! You love him and he loves you. Heaven has granted you to be united ; the happiness of life lies in those two words."

And Catherine rose and took a step towards the staircase.

" Where are you going ? " asked the mother.

" I am going up to my little room," was the reply.

" Oh yes, true, we are expecting company and you are going to beautify yourself, you flirt."

" Company ? "

" Yes, M. Raisin, Mademoiselle Euphrosine and M. Louis Chollet, the Parisian. I fancy you know him." And the old dame accompanied this last clause with a knowing smile, adding : " Make yourself nice, make yourself nice, my child ! "

But Catherine shook her head sadly. " Oh, Lord knows it is not for that I am going up," said she.

" And why are you going up, then ? "

" Because my room looks on the road by which Bernard is to come back, and Bernard is the only one in this dear house who has not yet bid me welcome." And she went slowly up the staircase that wound along the wall and the wooden steps of which creaked under her feet, light and dainty as they were.

At the moment she was entering her room a long sigh escaped from her heart and reached the ear of Marianne, who looking at her in astonishment seemed from that time to begin to have a glimpse of the truth.

No doubt the old woman, whose mind did not readily pass from one idea to another, would have remained absorbed in the search for the luminous spark which was being born in the depths of her brain if a voice had not rung out behind her.

"Hi, look here, Mother Watrin!" it said.

She turned round and recognized Mathieu, dressed in a shabby overcoat which had pretensions to having once been a livery.

"Oh, it is you, you rascal!" she said.

"Thanks!" answered he, taking off his hat, on which was some old imitation gold lace turning black. "Only take notice that from to-day I take the place of old Pierre and am in the Maire's service, so that to insult me is to insult him."

"Well, there you are. And what do you come for?"

"I come as a courier—there has not been time to get me into training yet, that is why I get out of breath—I come as a courier to tell you that Mademoiselle Euphrosine and her good father are coming this very moment in a chaise."

"In a chaise?" cried the old woman, quite dazzled at being visited by people who came in such an aristocratic conveyance.

"Yes, in a chaise, neither more nor less."

"Lord, Lord!" cried she, "where are they?"

"The papa and M. Guillaume are talking over their business together."

"And Mademoiselle Euphrosine?"

"Look," said Mathieu, "there she is!" Then dropping back suddenly into his part as a servant: "Mademoiselle Euphrosine Raisin," he announced, "M. Raisin, the Maire's daughter!"

CHAPTER X

MADEMOISELLE EUPHROSINE RAISIN

THE young girl thus pompously announced entered the home of the old forester majestically, looking as if she did not doubt for an instant the great honour she was doing this poor house in crossing its humble threshold.

She was undeniably a handsome girl, but with the sort of hard, defiant beauty that appeals to us but little, compounded as it is of about equal parts of pride and vulgarity, flavoured with that freshness of youth which the young folks of the lower orders so happily style *beauté du diable*.

She was dressed with all the profusion of ornaments which marks the provincial belle. She came in and cast a glance around her, evidently looking for two persons who were not there,—Bernard and Catherine.

Mère Watrin stood as though entranced by this dazzling beauty, who appeared at nine in the morning as much bedizened as she would have been of an evening at a ball by the light of five hundred wax candles.

Then rushing at a chair which she pushed towards her fair visitor, she cried, "Oh, my dear young lady!"

"Good day, dear Madame Watrin," answered Mademoiselle with a patronizing air, motioning to show that she would remain standing.

"What, it is you," went on the old dame, "you in our poor little house! But do sit down. For sure, the chairs are not padded as they are with you. Never mind, sit down all the same, pray do. And I not dressed! Upon my word, I did not expect you so early."

"You will excuse us," replied Euphrosine, "my dear Madame Watrin, but one is always in a hurry to see people one likes."

"Oh, you are too good. To be sure, I am quite confused."

"Bah!" remarked Mademoiselle, throwing back her

mantle and showing a regular Court costume, "you know I do not care about ceremony, and you see how plainly dressed I am myself."

"I see," said Mère Watrin, dazzled, "that you are beautiful as an angel and decked out like a holy shrine. But it is not my fault if I *am* behindhand. My little girl has come back to us from Paris this morning."

"It is not your niece, little Catherine, you mean?" asked Mademoiselle Euphrosine carelessly.

"Yes, she and none other. But we make a mistake in calling her *little girl* and *little Catherine*; she is really a big girl, a head taller than I am."

"Oh, so much the better," cried Mademoiselle Euphrosine; "I am very fond of your niece, do you know."

"That's a great honour for her, Mademoiselle," replied Mère Watrin, dropping a curtsey.

"What terribly bad weather!" went on the young lady, passing lightly from one subject to another, as befitted a town-bred young lady, educated as she had been. "You know, for a May day, I mean." Then, as if incidentally, "By the bye," she added, "where is Monsieur Bernard?"

"Out shooting, I suppose."

"Hasn't the Inspector been pleased to grant you permission to kill a boar on the occasion of the fête of Corcy?"

"Yes, and to celebrate Catherine's home-coming too."

"Oh, so you think that the Inspector troubled himself about that?"

And Mademoiselle Raisin made a little *moue*, which signified, "the Inspector cannot be very busy if he has time to think of such follies."

The old woman instinctively felt Mademoiselle Raisin's animosity, and caught at the side of the conversation which she guessed would be most agreeable to her.

"Bernard, you said? You asked where Bernard is? Really I don't know at all. He ought to be here since you are. Do you know where he is, Mathieu?"

"I?" replied Mathieu. "How should I know?"

"Why, no doubt he is with his cousin," said Mademoiselle Euphrosine, acidly.

"Oh no, no, no!" cried the old woman emphatically.

"And—has she improved in looks, your niece?" queried Mademoiselle.

"My niece?"

"Yes."

"Improved in looks?"

"That is what I am asking."

"She is—she is very nice-looking," answered Mère Watrin, awkwardly.

"I am so delighted she has come back," went on Mademoiselle Raisin, resuming her patronizing airs. "I only hope Paris has not given her habits that are above her station."

"Oh no, there is no fear. You know that she was at Paris to learn the business of milliner and dressmaker?"

"And you think she has learnt nothing else at Paris? Well, well! so much the better. But what is wrong with you, Madame Watrin? You seem uneasy."

"Oh, nothing, nothing, Mademoiselle. However, if you would allow me, I could call Catherine to keep you company while I go . . ."

And she cast a despairing glance at her unpretending costume, which was her workaday one.

"Do just as you like," replied Mademoiselle Euphrosine, with a mixture of indifference and condescension. "As for me I should be charmed to see her, the dear little thing."

Scarcely had Mother Watrin received this permission, when turning towards the staircase, she cried, "Catherine, Catherine, come down quickly, my dear, come down! Mademoiselle Euphrosine is here."

Catherine appeared instantly on the landing.

"Come down, my dear, come down!" cried Mère Watrin, for the second time; and the girl came downstairs without a word.

"Now, Mademoiselle, may I be excused?" asked old Marianne, turning to the Maire's daughter.

"Why, of course, of course. Off with you!"

Then she turned a furtive glance at Catherine while the old woman was in the act of withdrawing with a profusion of curtsies.

"Why," cried Mademoiselle Raisin, aside and frowning,

" she is something a great deal more than pretty, the child is! Whatever was Mère Watrin thinking of? "

Catherine, meanwhile, came forward, without embarrassment or affected modesty and stopping before Mademoiselle Euphrosine, who looked at her with a most dignified air, said, with perfect simplicity, " Pray excuse me, Mademoiselle, but I was not aware you were here, else I should have hastened to come down and pay my respects to you."

" Oh," muttered Mademoiselle Euphrosine, talking to herself, but loud enough for Catherine not to lose a word of her monologue, " ' I was not aware, else I should have hastened to pay my respects! ' Why, really, she is quite the Parisian, and she must marry M. Chollet. They will make a pair! " Then turning to Catherine, " Mademoiselle," she said, with a mocking accent, " I have the honour to give you good day."

" Did my aunt remember to ask if you wanted anything, Mademoiselle? " asked Catherine, without appearing to notice the least in the world the spiteful significance the Maire's daughter had put into her words.

" Yes, but I wanted nothing."

Then with an air of putting an end to their present relations, which were on a footing of equality, she went on, " Have you brought any new patterns from Paris? "

" Yes, for the last month before I came away, I have been trying my best to get together whatever was new and pretty, Mademoiselle."

" You learned to make bonnets there? "

" Bonnets and hats."

" Whom were you with? Madame Baudraud or Madame Barenne? "

" I was in a more humble house than either of those, Mademoiselle, but I hope, nevertheless, that I know my business none the less well."

" Well, we shall see that presently," answered Mademoiselle Raisin, with a patronizing air. " As soon as you are installed in your shop in the Place de La Fontaine, I will send you some old bonnets to re-make and a last year's hat to do up."

" Thank you, Mademoiselle," said Catherine, bowing. But suddenly the girl raised her head, listened and trembled. She thought she had heard her name spoken. And, in fact, a voice that was well known to her heart was calling from outside, coming rapidly nearer. " Catherine ! Where is Catherine ? "

At the same time Bernard rushed into the room, covered with dust and his brow running with sweat.

" Ah ! " he cried, catching sight of her, in the tone of a man who has long been under water, and comes to the top and gets his breath again. " So it is you, it is really you ? At last, at last ! "

And he fell on a chair, holding the girl's hands in his the while.

" Bernard ! dear Bernard ! " cried she, offering him her cheek.

At the cry uttered by her son, Mère Watrin had come in, and seeing on the one side Mademoiselle Euphrosine standing alone, her face contorted, and on the other this group oblivious of the world and all else but its own happiness, she realized her mistake as to the amorous feelings of her son towards Mademoiselle Raisin, and much hurt at finding her perspicacity so totally at fault, cried, " Well, Bernard, well ! Is that a way to behave ? "

But he, without listening to his mother or noticing the presence of Mademoiselle Euphrosine, went on, " Ah, Catherine, if you knew how I have suffered ! I thought . . . I was afraid . . . but no matter, you are here ! You came by Meaux and La Ferté-Milon, did you not ? I know that, François told me so, so that you must have travelled all night and come three leagues in a fly. Poor, dear child ! Oh ! how glad I am, how happy to see you again ! "

" Why, boy, why," cried the mother indignantly, " you are taking no notice of Mademoiselle Euphrosine."

" Oh, beg pardon ! " said Bernard, looking up in astonishment in the direction of the girl ; " true, excuse me ; I did not see you. Your servant ! "

Then coming back to Catherine, " How tall she is and how pretty ! Why, look, mother, do look ! "

"Have you had good sport, Monsieur Bernard?" asked Euphrosine.

Her voice reached his ear like a vague sound of which he nevertheless managed to grasp the sense.

"I . . . no . . . yes . . . I don't know," he replied. "Has any one been shooting? Here now, excuse me, I am losing my head, so delighted am I. I went to meet Catherine, that's what I did."

"And you did not find her, it appears?"

"No, luckily!"

"Luckily?"

"Oh, yes, yes. This time I know what I am saying."

"If you know what you are saying, Monsieur Bernard," resumed Euphrosine, putting out her arm as if in search of support, "for my part, I do not know what is the matter with me. I am not well!"

But Bernard was so taken up with Catherine, she was smiling so tenderly at him. She was thanking him with such sweet pressures of the hand for the emotion of which he had just given such proofs that he did not hear what Euphrosine said, nor see how pale she was and how she trembled or made believe to do so.

It was not so with Mère Watrin, who never took her eyes off Mademoiselle Euphrosine's face.

"Oh! Bernard! Bernard!" she cried breathlessly, "don't you see that Mademoiselle feels unwell."

"Oh yes, no doubt," said he, "it is too hot here. Mother, give the young lady your arm, and you, François, carry an arm-chair outside."

"Here is the arm-chair you ask for," said the latter.

"No, no," said Mademoiselle Euphrosine, "it will be nothing."

"Oh, but it is," persisted the old woman. "You are quite pale, dear young lady, and one would say you were going to faint."

"It's air," cried Bernard, "air that the young lady wants."

"Do at any rate give me your arm, Monsieur Bernard," said she, with a languishing air.

Bernard saw that there was no drawing back.

"Why, young lady," he said, "with the greatest pleasure."

Then in an undertone to Catherine, "Stay there, I am coming back."

Taking Euphrosine by the arm, he drew her along more hastily than her apparent weakness seemed quite to warrant, while François, in obedience to the order he had received, followed. Then he said, "Here is the arm-chair," to which Mère Watrin added, "And some vinegar to rub her temples."

Catherine was left alone. What had just taken place, Bernard's genuine cordiality, Euphrosine's feigned collapse, had spoken more clearly to her eyes and yet more to her heart than all the explanations and speeches in the world could have done.

"Ah, now," she thought, "Mère Marianne may say what she pleases, I am quite assured."

Scarcely had she ended these words when Bernard came in again and threw himself at her feet. At the same time François, pulling the door to on the outside, shut them in with their love and their happiness.

"Oh, Catherine!" cried Bernard, clasping the girl's knees, "how I love you! How happy I am!"

Catherine drooped her head and the eyes of the two young people spoke so eloquently what they had to say, that without a single word being uttered, their breath mingled and their lips met. Their two breasts gave vent to two simultaneous cries of joy which were as one, and they remained with dim eyes plunged in such a sweet ecstasy that they did not see Mathieu's malevolent head thrust through the partly opened door of the kitchen, nor hear his harsh voice muttering, "Ah, Monsieur Bernard, you gave me a slap on the head; that slap shall cost you dear, my lad!"

CHAPTER XI

DREAMS OF LOVE

AN hour later, like birds that have taken flight, carried away on a breeze of morning, a sunbeam, a murmur of the trees, the two young people had disappeared and in their stead, in the low-roofed parlour of the *Maison Neuve*, were two men bending over a map of the forest of Villers-Cotterets, tracing an outline that one of them had a great tendency to enlarge, but that the other at every extension brought back within the limits agreed on.

These two men were Anastase Raisin, Maire of Villers, and our old friend, Guillaume Watrin.

The bounds that the wood-merchant was always wanting to enlarge and the head-keeper pitilessly restricted to the line traced by the Inspector's compasses were those of the "lot" bought by Monsieur Raisin at the last adjudication.

At last Watrin, nodding his head approvingly and knocking his short pipe against his nail to get rid of the ashes, said to the wood-merchant, "Do you know that it is a fine lot you have there and not at all dear?"

Monsieur Raisin rose in his turn.

"Not dear at 200,000 francs?" cried he. "Egad! it seems money is easy for you to come by, Père Guillaume."

"Oh yes, that's very fine talking!" was the reply. "Nine hundred livres a year, house and firing, every day a brace of rabbits in the pot, and on high days and holidays a bit of boar, a man cannot but become a millionaire on all that, can he?"

"Bah!" said the timber-merchant, looking at Watrin and smiling that subtle smile which one may call the smile of trade, "you always get to be a millionaire if you choose —relatively, of course."

"Then tell me something of your secret," rejoined Guillaume. "That will please me, on my honour."

The timber-merchant again looked at the keeper with a steady and shining eye. Then as if he thought that the

moment for making so important an overture was not yet come, he replied, "Why, yes, you will be told the secret after dinner when we are alone, glass in hand, drinking the health of our respective children, and if there is a way to manage, well, you know, Père Guillaume, we will do a deal together."

The latter looked up in his turn, pursing his lips and shaking his head; and it was difficult enough to guess what answer he was going to make to this half-overture on the Maire's part when Marianne entered in a thorough fright.

"Oh, M. le Maire," she cried, "there's a calamity!"

"Good gracious, what is it, Madame Watrin?" asked he, somewhat uneasy.

As for Watrin, accustomed to the ways of his wife, he seemed less impressed than his guest, the wood-merchant.

"What is it, eh?" said the latter again.

"What has happened, old lady?" asked Watrin.

"What has happened is, that here's poor Mademoiselle Euphrosine saying she is indisposed."

"Bah! That is nothing," said the Maire, who probably knew his daughter as well as the other knew his wife.

"Oh, stuff and nonsense!" muttered the Forester, who for his part seemed to have arrived at a pretty correct estimate of Mademoiselle Euphrosine.

"But," went on the mother, "she wants absolutely to go back to town."

"Come, all right!" cried Raisin. "Is Chollet there? If he is, he can drive her home."

"No, he has not been seen yet, and that, I believe, is what has added to the young lady's ailment."

"Where is she, Euphrosine I mean?"

"She has got into the carriage again and is asking for you."

"Well, all right. Wait, that's it. Till we meet, Père Watrin. We have to have a long talk. I will drive her back and in an hour—the horses are good—in an hour I shall be here again, and if you are a good fellow—Well, shake hands: I'll say no more to you now. See you again, Père Guillaume. See you again, Mère Watrin. Look well

to the stew, and there will be pins in plenty to fasten your cooking apron with."

And as the Maire departed at these words the old lady saw him out, making many curtsies and saying, "See you again, M. le Maire! Make many excuses for me to Mademoiselle Euphrosine."

Guillaume had remained where he was, shaking his head. Decidedly he had not made a mistake as to the reason of the Maire's amiability. It was a question, as he had said, of pulling a cotton cap over his eyes.

So when Marianne came back crestfallen at the young lady's departure and saying, "Ah! my poor man, I hope you will scold Bernard?"

"And what should I scold him for?" inquired the Forester gruffly.

"What? Why, for having no eyes but for Catherine and scarcely so much as saying 'How d'ye do?' to Mademoiselle Raisin."

"Oh! That was only because he had seen Mademoiselle Raisin almost every day these eighteen months, while he has only seen his cousin twice in the same time."

"All the same . . . Oh dear! oh dear!" muttered Marianne miserably.

Père Guillaume remained not only insensible to this despair, but it even seemed to inspire him with some impatience.

He looked at his wife.

"Tell me now, mother," he asked.

"Well, what?"

"Did you hear what M. le Maire said to you?"

"What about?"

"About the game stew which he advised you to be careful of."

"Yes."

"Well, it's good advice, wife, that he gave to you there."

"But what I wanted to tell you is . . ."

"And then there is the tart that ought to be put in the oven."

"Oh, yes, I understand, you are sending me away."

"I am not sending you away. I only tell you to go to the kitchen and see if I am there."

"Very well," said she, with wounded dignity, "I am going to the kitchen; I am going."

"Look!" said the Forester, following his wife with his eyes, "to think that it is no harder than that to be pleasant, and that you so seldom are."

"Oh, I am pleasant because I am going away then. That's a pretty thing to say."

He went to a window, pulled his pipe out of his pocket, and began to whistle a tune.

"Oh yes," said the mother, "that's all very fine, what you are doing now; whistle away, do!"

Then as she reached the kitchen door, "At last!" she said. And out she went.

"Yes," muttered Guillaume, left alone, "yes, I whistle because I see the poor dear children, and because it makes me happy to see them! Look you," he added, although there was no one to share his pleasure with, "would not anyone say that they were two angels, so beautiful and smiling are they? They are coming this way; don't let us disturb them."

And Father Guillaume, still whistling, went up to his room, lowering the pitch as they came nearer so that at the moment he opened his room door, they appeared on the threshold of the parlour downstairs.

But from the top of the staircase where he had stopped so as to see them as long as possible he murmured these words, "God bless you, my children! They do not hear me; so much the better. It is because they are listening to another voice which sings more softly than mine."

He was not mistaken; this voice which did not reach him but which he guessed at, was the heavenly voice of youth and love. And this is what it said by the mouth of the two young people.

"Will you always love me?" asked Catherine.

"Always," answered Bernard.

"Well, it is strange," said she, "this promise which ought to fill my heart with joy makes me feel quite sad instead."

"Poor, dear Catherine!" murmured he in his softest tone, "if I make you sad by telling you that I love you, I don't know what to say to make you gay."

"Bernard," went on the girl, answering her lover's thought rather than his words, "your parents have been married for twenty-six years and excepting some little differences of no consequence live as happily as the day of their wedding. Every time I look at them, I ask myself if we shall be as happy, and above all, if we shall be happy as long as they have been."

"And why not?" said Bernard.

"The question I ask you," replied Catherine, "my mother, if I had one, would ask you herself in her solicitude for the happiness of her daughter: I am an orphan and all my happiness, as all my love, is in your hands. Listen, Bernard, if you think it possible that you may some day love me less than you do now, let us part at once! I should die of it, I know, but if you were to cease to love me some day! Oh, I would rather die while you still love me than live to see that day."

"Look at me, Catherine," answered Bernard, "and you will find my answer written in my eyes."

"But have you tried yourself, Bernard, are you sure that it is not the affection of a brother rather than the passion of a lover that you have for me?"

"I have not tried myself," said the young man, "but you have tried me."

"I! And how so?"

"By your eighteen months of absence. Do you think that those eighteen months of separation are not test enough? Apart from my two short journeys to Paris and some days of happiness, since you left I have not lived, for it is not living to live without a heart in your bosom, to love nothing, to enjoy nothing, to be in a bad humour all day long. My God! all who know me will tell you the same; my forest, this beautiful forest where I was born, my great oaks that rustle in the wind, my beautiful beeches, with their silver bark, well, since your going away, all these things have ceased to give me any pleasure. In old days, when I started in the morning, in the voices of all the wakening

birds that sang their matins to the Lord of Heaven, I heard your voice. In the evening when I came back and leaving my companions to follow the path I plunged into the wood, it was because there was a fair white phantom that summoned me, gliding among the trees and showing me the way, and which vanished when I drew near the house, and which I found standing waiting for me at the door. Since you went away, Catherine, there has not been a morning that I have not said to the others, 'Where are the birds? I no longer hear them sing as I used!' And there has not been an evening when instead of arriving before all the rest, gay, brisk and joyous, I have not come last, tired, doleful and weary!"

"Dear Bernard!" murmured Catherine, offering her fair brow to the young man to kiss.

"But since you have been here, Catherine," he went on with that youthful enthusiasm which belongs only to the first beatings of the heart, to the first dreams of imagination, "since you have been here, all is changed. The birds have come back to the branches, my beautiful phantom, I am sure, is waiting for me yonder under the tall trees to make me leave the path and guide me towards the house, and on the threshold of that house, oh! on the threshold I am assured of finding again, no longer the ghost of love, but the reality of happiness."

"Oh, my Bernard, how I love you!" cried Catherine.

"And then . . . and then . . ." he continued, frowning and passing his hand over his forehead, "and then . . . But no, I will not speak to you of that."

"Speak to me of everything. Tell me all! I want to know all."

"And then, this morning, Catherine, when that scamp of a Mathieu showed me the Parisian's letter—the letter in which that man spoke to you, you, my Catherine, to whom I speak as I should to the Virgin, in which that man spoke to you, my fair lily of the woods, as he does to his town girls,—well, I felt such a pang I thought I was going to die, and at the same time such fury that I said to myself, 'I am going to die it may be, but before dying I will kill him first, anyway!'"

"Yes," said she, in her most caressing tone, "and that is why you went off along the Gondreville road with your gun loaded, instead of waiting quietly for your Catherine here. That is why you covered six leagues in two hours and a half at the risk of dying of fatigue and heat. But you were punished—you saw your Catherine an hour the later for it. It is true the innocent was punished with the guilty, jealous boy!"

"Yes, yes, jealous!" murmured he, with clenched teeth, "that is the word. Oh, you don't know what jealousy is, you don't."

"I do. For an instant I was jealous," said she, laughing. "But don't be afraid, I am so no longer."

"That is to say, look you," he went on, putting his closed fist to his forehead, "that is to say that if ill-luck had so willed it that you had not received that letter, or having received it had not altered your route; if, in fact, you had come by Villers-Cotterets, and had met that fool—dear, dear, dear! at the very thought of it, Catherine, my hand goes out towards my gun and . . ."

"Hush!" cried she, alarmed at the look on the young man's face, and at the same time, as it were, startled by an apparition.

"I be quiet? And why should I be quiet?"

"There, there, there!" murmured she, putting her mouth near his ear, "there, he is there, at the door!"

"He!" cried Bernard, "and what can he want here?"

"Silence," said Catherine, pressing the young man's arm, "it was your mother herself who asked him to come with the Maire and Mademoiselle Euphrosine. Bernard, he is your guest."

In sooth, at that moment a young man, elegantly dressed in morning frock-coat and a light-coloured cravat with a whip in his hand, had just made his appearance in the doorway, and seeing the young people almost in each other's arms, seemed to be asking himself whether he ought to go in or out.

Bernard's glance met his for a moment. The eyes of the young keeper darted lightning. The Parisian realized instinctively that he had just fallen into the lion's den.

" Excuse me, Monsieur Bernard," he murmured, " but I was looking for . . ."

" Yes," was the answer, " and in looking you have found what you did not look for, eh ? "

" Bernard ! " said Catherine, quite low, " Bernard ! "

" Let be," said the young keeper, trying to free himself from Catherine's embrace, " I have a few words to say to M. Chollet. When they are said, when the question is clearly and distinctly set forth between us, all will be done."

" Bernard ! " pleaded she, " be calm, keep your temper."

" Do not be afraid. Only let me say two words to . . . this gentleman, or faith, I will say four instead of two."

" Very well, but . . ."

" But I tell you to be quiet."

And with a movement, the violence of which could not be mistaken, he pushed Catherine towards the door. The girl realized that physical or moral obstacle would only augment the anger of her lover. She withdrew with her hands clasped, contenting herself with beseeching looks.

The door of the kitchen having closed on her, the two young men were alone. Bernard convinced himself that the door was properly shut by going himself and settling the latch in its socket. Then coming back to the Parisian, " Well, sir," he said, " I too was looking for something or rather some one. I was looking for you, M. Chollet ! "

" Me ? "

" Yes, you."

The young man smiled. As soon as a man began to attack him he would answer him manfully.

" You were looking for me ? "

" Yes."

" Yet I am not difficult to find, I fancy."

" Except when you start off in the morning in your tilbury to wait for the coach from Paris on the Gondreville road."

The young man drew himself up, and with a scornful smile, said, " I go out in the morning at what hour I please, and I go where I please, Monsieur Bernard. That is my business."

"You are perfectly right, sir. Every one is free to act as he will. But there is a truth which you will not dispute, I hope, although it comes from me, any more than I did your maxim."

"And that is?"

"That every one is master of his own."

"I do not dispute it, Monsieur Bernard."

"Now you understand, Monsieur Chollet. My property is my field, if I am a farmer; my sheepfold if I raise stocks; my homestead if I am a yeoman. Well, if a boar comes out of the forest and damages my field, I lie in ambush and shoot the boar. A wolf comes out of the wood to kill my sheep; I send a bullet at him and that is for his pains. A fox comes into my farmyard and kills my fowls; I catch the fox in a trap and break his head with kicks from my booted heel. As long as the field was not mine, as the sheep were not owned by me, as the fowls belonged to others I did not claim this right; but directly field, sheep and poultry are mine, it is another matter.

"Oh, by the bye, Monsieur Chollet, I have the honour to inform you that, granting the consent of my father and mother, I am going to marry Catherine and in a fortnight she will be my wife, my very own, my property and my possession consequently. Which means, 'let the boar who should come and root up my field beware! Let the wolf who would prowl round my sheep take care! Woe to the fox who covets my poultry!' Now if you have any objections to make to all this, make them, Monsieur Chollet, make them to me at once. I am listening."

"Unfortunately," rejoined the Parisian who, brave though he was, was probably not sorry to be saved from an awkward predicament, "unfortunately you are not the only one listening."

"Not the only one?"

"No. Do you wish me to answer in presence of a woman and a priest?"

Bernard turned round and saw sure enough the Abbé Grégoire and Catherine on the doorstep. "No, you are right; do not speak," he said.

"Then we shall meet to-morrow?" asked Chollet.

"To-morrow, the day after, when you will, where you will, how you will."

"Well and good!"

"My friend," put in Catherine, only too pleased that the coming of the good priest had supplied her with this means of intervening, "here is our dear Abbé Grégoire, whom we love with our whole hearts and whom I for my part have not seen for eighteen months."

"Good day, my children, good day!" said the Abbé.

The two young men exchanged a last look which amounted to a mutual defiance, and while Louis Chollet withdrew, bowing to Catherine and the priest, Bernard came forward with smiling brow and lips to kiss the hand of the good priest, saying, "Welcome to you, man of peace! to this house, where we ask no better than to live in peace."

CHAPTER XII

THE ABBÉ GRÉGOIRE

THERE are in the most ordinary lives events which seem providential. The appearance of Abbé Grégoire just at the right point, at the moment when the young men would probably have exchanged defiances, was one of these incidents.

So as it was a long journey for the good Abbé to come between Low Mass and Vespers to the *Maison Neuve*, where he had only been once before, and as nothing accounted for his being there at the time of the day when he appeared, Bernard, after kissing his hand, raised his head and asked him laughingly, "What do you come here for, your Reverence?"

"I?"

"Yes. I bet," went on Bernard, "that you do not guess what you came to do, or rather what you are going to do, at the New House."

The Abbé did not even try to solve the species of riddle which was asked him.

"Man proposes and God disposes," he said. "I hold myself at the disposal of God." Then he added, "As for me, I intended merely to pay a visit to your father."

"Have you seen him?" asked Bernard.

"No, not yet," was the reply.

"Your Reverence," went on Bernard, looking tenderly at Catherine while speaking to the priest, "you are always welcome, but more welcome to-day than any other."

"Yes, I can fancy so because of the arrival of this dear child."

"To some extent on that account, dear Abbé, but a good deal on account of something else."

"Well, my children," said he, looking round for a chair, "tell me about it."

Bernard ran for an easy-chair and putting it within reach of the priest, who, tired by his walk, was nothing loth to sit down, said, "Listen, your Reverence, I ought perhaps to make you a long speech, but I prefer to tell you the thing in two words. We want to get married, Catherine and I."

"Ah! ah! So you love Catherine, boy?" asked the Abbé.

"I should think I do love her."

"And you, do you love Bernard, my child?"

"Oh, with my whole soul!"

"But it seems to me that you ought to make this avowal to your parents!"

"Yes, your Reverence, but you are the friend of my father, you are the confessor of my mother, you are to all of us our Abbé. Well, talk it over with Father Guillaume, who will speak of it to Mother Marianne. Try to obtain their consent for us, which I hope will not be difficult, and you will see two young people made very happy. Oh look," and he placed his hand on the Abbé's shoulder, "there is Père Guillaume coming out of his room. You know the redoubt that has to be carried, charge home! Meanwhile we will take a walk, Catherine and I, and sing your praises. Come, Catherine."

And the two, joyous and light as two birds, took their flight towards the door and from the door struck off through

the woods. Meanwhile Père Guillaume had stopped on the landing, and the Abbé, turning towards him, greeted him with a wave of the hand.

"I saw you coming a long way off," began Father Guillaume, "and said to myself 'It's the Abbé! Why, my word, it's the Abbé,' only I could not believe it. What luck! and to-day of all days. I bet you have not come for us, but to see Catherine."

"Oh no, you are mistaken, for I did not know she had come."

"Then you must have been all the more delighted to find her here, eh? There, how pretty she has grown. You are staying to dinner, I hope? Oh, I warn you, your Reverence, every one that comes into this house to-day does not leave it before two in the morning."

And Père Guillaume proceeded to come down, holding out his two open hands to the Abbé.

"Two o'clock in the morning!" repeated the Abbé. 'Why, that has never happened to me before to get to bed at such a time."

"Bah, how about the midnight Mass?"

"How shall I get away?"

"M. le Maire will drive you home in his chaise."

The Abbé shook his head.

"Hum! We are none too friendly, the Maire and I."

"That's your fault," said Guillaume.

"How my fault?" asked the priest, astonished that his old friend the Forester should say he was in the wrong so at the first go off.

"Oh yes, you have had the misfortune to repeat in his presence, 'Thou shalt not steal thy neighbour's goods, nor keep aught stolen wittingly.'"

"Well," said the Abbé, "I do not say that at the risk of going back on foot at night I will not join you. For that matter I guessed when I came here that I should stay longer than I ought, and I begged the Curé to take my place at vespers and evensong."

"Bravo! Why, you give me back all my good temper, Abbé!"

"So much the better," replied he, leaning on the Forester's arm, "for I want to find you in that frame of mind."

"Me," said the old man astonished.

"Yes. You are a bit surly at times."

"Go on."

"And to-day in particular——"

The Abbé paused and looked at Guillaume in a peculiar way.

"What?" asked the Forester.

"Well, to-day, I have here and there two or three things to ask you."

"Me! Two or three things?"

"Well, let us call it two, not to frighten you."

"For whom?"

"You must, for that matter, be used to it, Père Guillaume; every time I hold out my hand to you, it is to say, my dear Monsieur Watrin, charity, if you please."

"Well, what is it? Let us see," asked the old man, laughing.

"In the first place about old Pierre."

"Oh yes, poor devil. I know his misfortune. That vagabond of a Mathieu has managed to get him sent away from M. Raisin's."

"He had been there twenty years and because of a letter lost the day before yesterday . . ."

"Monsieur Raisin was in the wrong," said Guillaume. "I have told him so already this morning and you must tell him the same, when he comes back. You do not turn away a servant of twenty years' standing: such a servant is part of the family. I should not turn away a dog that had been ten years in my yard."

"Oh, I know your good heart, Père Guillaume. So I started out early in the morning to make a collection for the man. Some gave me ten sous, others twenty. Then I thought of you. I said to myself I will go to the *Maison Neuve* on the Soissons Road: it is a league and a half there and a league and a half back, three altogether. I will rate Guillaume at twenty sous the league, which will make three francs. Not to mention that I shall have the pleasure of shaking him by the hand."

"Lord reward you, reverend sir. For you have a good heart."

And feeling in his pocket he brought out two five-franc pieces and gave them to the Abbé.

"Oh," said the latter, "ten francs! It's a deal for your income, dear Monsieur Watrin."

"I owe something more than other people, since it was I who picked up that whelp of a Mathieu, and it was to some extent from my house that he started out to do the mischief."

"I should prefer," said the Abbé, turning the five-franc pieces over in his fingers, as if he felt compunction in depriving the poor household of such a sum, "I should prefer, dear Father Guillaume, for you to give me only three francs, or even nothing at all, and instead let him have leave to pick up a little wood in your beat."

Père Guillaume looked the Abbé straight between the eyes, as they say, then with a fine look of simple-minded uprightness said, "The wood belongs to his Highness, the Duke of Orleans, my dear Abbé, whereas the money is mine. So take the money and let Pierre take care not to touch the wood. Now that matter is settled, let us go on to the other. Come, what else have you to ask me?"

"I have taken charge of a petition."

"To whom?"

"To you."

"A petition to me? Well, let us see it."

"It is verbal."

"Who is it from?"

"Bernard."

"What does he want?"

"He wants . . ."

"Well, do finish!"

"Well, he wants to get married."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried his father.

"Why, 'oh, oh'? Is he not old enough?"

"Oh yes! But whom does he want to marry?"

"A good girl whom he loves and who loves him."

"If only it is not Mademoiselle Euphrosine that he loves,

I will let him take what wife he likes, if it were my grandmother."

"Set your mind at rest, my worthy friend. The woman that he loves is Catherine."

"Really? really?" cried the old man joyously. "Bernard loves Catherine and Catherine him?"

"Had you no idea of it?"

"Aye, but I was afraid I might be mistaken."

"You consent, then?"

"With all my heart," cried Guillaume. Then suddenly checking himself, added, "But . . ."

"But what?"

"Why only that I must speak to the old woman about it. All that we have done for twenty-six years has been done by common consent. Bernard is her son as well as mine. So the old woman must be told. Yes, yes, that is so; it must be done."

Then going and opening the kitchen door he called, "Hi, mother, come here."

He then went back to the Abbé, grasping his pipe between his teeth and rubbing his hands, which with him was a sign of the greatest satisfaction.

"Ah, that rascal of a Bernard. It is quite the slyest trick he has played in his life."

At this moment Madame Watrin appeared at the door of her kitchen, wiping her forehead with her white apron.

"Well, come, what is it?" she asked.

"Come here, I tell you," rejoined Guillaume.

"Oh, how stupid of you to disturb me like that just as I was making my paste."

Then suddenly catching sight of the visitor, whom she had not noticed, "What, the Abbé Grégoire!" she cried. "Your servant, your Reverence. I did not know you were there, but for that there could have been no occasion for calling me."

"Good," said Guillaume to him, "you hear, you hear. There she is off."

"Are you well?" she went on. "And your niece, Mademoiselle Alexandrine, is she well? You know that

every one in the house is delighted over Catherine coming home ? "

" Well, well, well ! You will help me to put a martingale on her, won't you, your Reverence, if I cannot manage her alone ? "

" Why did you call me, then," rejoined Marianne, with a remnant of bitterness from her late outbursts, " if you keep me from paying my respects to his Reverence and asking him his news ? "

" I called you to give you the chance of doing me a favour, my dear."

" And what's that ? "

" The favour of giving me your opinion in two words and plainly on an important matter. Bernard wants to marry."

" Bernard ! marry ? And whom ? "

" His cousin."

" What, Catherine ? "

" Yes, Catherine. And now, your opinion. Come, quick, out with it."

" Catherine," she replied, " is a good child, an excellent girl."

" That sounds well. Go on."

" Who could not put us to shame . . ."

" Get along ! Get along ! "

" Only, she has nothing."

" Nothing ? "

" Absolutely nothing."

" Woman, do not weigh in the balance a few miserable crowns and the lifelong misery of these poor children."

" But all the same, father, it is ill living without money."

" Yet 'tis still worse for folk living without love."

" Ah, that's true," murmured she.

" When we married," went on the father, " had we any money ? No, we were as poor as a couple of Church mice, not to mention that to-day we are not yet very rich. Well, what would you have said then if our relatives had wished to separate us on the pretext that we lacked some hundreds of crowns to set up house with ? "

"Yes, all that is very well," replied the mother, "But that is not the only obstacle."

And she uttered these words in a tone which made Guillaume understand that if he thought all was done he was mistaken, and that difficulty was going to arise as serious as unexpected.

"Good," said he, bracing himself too for the struggle. "What is this obstacle? Come, now."

"Oh, you understand me quite well."

"No matter. Do as if I did not understand you."

"Guillaume, Guillaume," said she, shaking her head, "we cannot put this marriage on our conscience."

"And why so?"

"Good Lord, why because she is a heretic."

"Oh, wife, wife," cried he, stamping his foot, "I guessed that would be the stone of stumbling, and yet I would not believe it."

"What would you have, father? As I was twenty years ago, so I am to-day. I opposed as much as I could the marriage of her poor mother to Friedrich Blum. Unfortunately she was your sister. She was free and did not need my consent. Only I said, 'Rose, remember my prophecy. It will bring you ill luck to marry a heretic.' She did not listen to me and married him and my prediction has come true. The father was killed, the mother is dead, and the little girl was left an orphan."

"Well, you are not going to reproach her with that, surely?"

"No, but I reproach her with being a heretic."

"Why, wretched woman!" cried he, "do you know what a heretic is?"

"It is a creature that will be damned."

"Even if she is virtuous?"

"Yes, even if she is virtuous."

"But if she is a good mother, a good wife, a good girl?"

"Even if she is all that."

"Even if she had all the virtues?"

"All the virtues put together make no difference, once she is a heretic."

"A thousand million devils!" cried the exasperated old man.

"Swear if you like," said Marianne. "But swearing will not change it."

"You are right. So I will have no more to do with it."

Then turning towards the worthy priest, who had listened to all this discussion without uttering a single word, he said, "And now, your Reverence, you have heard: I have no more to do with it. Now it is your turn."

Then darting out of the room like a man in a hurry to breathe the open air, he cried, "Oh, woman, woman! You must have been created and sent into the world to damn the human race!"

But meanwhile, shaking her head, she was muttering to herself, "No, it's no use his talking; it is impossible. Bernard shall never marry a heretic. Anything people like, but not that. No, no, no, not that!"

CHAPTER XIII

FATHER AND SON

FATHER GUILLAUME having gone out, the Abbé Grégoire and Madame Watrin remained facing each other.

There is no need to say that the Abbé had accepted the mission which the old Forester had entrusted to him when he left the scene of action, not like a man beaten, but as one who hesitates to employ, in order to conquer, arms which he would feel ashamed to use.

Unhappily, for thirty years past Marianne had been his penitent, and he knew well the woman with whom he would have to deal. And as Madame Watrin's besetting sin was obstinacy, he had no great hopes of succeeding where Guillaume had failed.

So in spite of his air of confidence it was with a certain internal misgiving that he entered on the question.

"Dear Madame Watrin," said he, going closer to her,

" have you no other objection to this marriage than the difference of religion ? "

" I, Monsieur l'Abbé ? " she replied. " None ! But it seems to me that is enough."

" Come, come ! in all conscience, Mother Watrin, instead of saying ' no,' you ought to say ' yes.' "

" Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé," cried Marianne, raising her eyes to heaven, " is it you who urge me to give my consent to such a marriage ? "

" Certainly it is I."

" Well, then I tell you that on the contrary it should be your duty to oppose it."

" My duty, dear Madame Watrin, is in the narrow path which I walk to give to those that follow me as much happiness as possible. My duty is to console the unhappy and above all to help those to be happy who have the chance of being so."

" This marriage would be the ruin of my child's soul. I refuse ! "

" Come, let us be reasonable, dear Madame Watrin," insisted the Abbé. " Catherine, although she is a Protestant, has always loved and respected you as a mother, has she not ? "

" Oh, on that head I have nothing to say. Always ! and it is only fair to say so."

" She is gentle, good, charitable ? "

" She is all that."

" Pious, sincere and modest ? "

" Yes."

" Well then, dear Madame Watrin, let your conscience be at rest. The religion which gives Catherine all these virtues will never destroy your son's soul."

" No, no, Monsieur l'Abbé. No, that cannot be ! " repeated Marianne, plunging farther and farther into her blind obstinacy.

" I beg of you to do it," said the Abbé.

" No."

" I entreat you."

" No, no, no ! "

The Abbé raised his eyes to heaven.

"Oh, my God, my God!" he murmured, "You that are so good, so clement, so merciful, You that need but a look to judge of men, oh, God! You see in what error this mother is, who gives to her blindness the name of piety; my God, enlighten her!"

But the good woman continued to make signs of refusal.

At this moment Guillaume, who no doubt had been listening at the door, came in again.

"Well, Monsieur l'Abbé," he asked, throwing a side glance at his wife, "has she grown more reasonable, this old woman of mine?"

"Madame Watrin will think it over, I hope," replied the Abbé.

"Ah!" cried Guillaume, shaking his head and clenching his fists. The gesture was seen by the mother, but in her imperturbable persistence she said: "Do what you like; I know you are master, but if you let them marry it will be against my will."

"A thousand demons! You hear her, Monsieur l'Abbé?" said Watrin.

"Patience, dear Monsieur Guillaume, patience!" replied the Abbé, seeing that the good man was getting hot.

"Patience, you say?" cried the old man. "Why, the man who would have patience in such circumstances would be no man! He would be a brute not worth a charge of powder and shot."

"Bah!" said the Abbé in a low voice, "she has a good heart; never fear, she will go back on herself."

"Yes, you are right, I do not want her to accept my opinion as if constrained and forced to do so; I do not want her to act the sorrowing mother, the martyred wife. I give her the whole day to consider, and if this evening she does not come of her own accord and say, 'Well, Father, we must let the children marry after all . . .'" Guillaume threw a side glance at his wife, but the latter shook her head, a gesture which redoubled the exasperation of the old head-keeper.

"If she does not come and say that to me," he went on, "well, listen, Monsieur l'Abbé, we have been together six-and-twenty years . . . yes, six-and-twenty years next

15th of June . . . well, Monsieur l'Abbé, on the faith of a man of honour we shall part as if it had only been yesterday, and we shall finish the few days that remain to us to live, she in her place and I in mine."

"What is that he is saying?" cried the old woman.

"Monsieur Watrin!" said the Abbé.

"I am saying—I am saying the truth. Do you hear, woman, do you hear?"

"Yes, yes, I hear. Oh, wretched, wretched woman that I am!"

And Mère Watrin plunged sobbing into her kitchen, yet without taking, desperate as she appeared to be and really and truly was, any step in the way of reconciliation.

Left together the Forester and the Abbé looked at each other. It was the latter that first broke the silence.

"My dear Guillaume," he said, "come, take courage and, above all, be calm."

"But did you ever see such a thing?" cried Watrin, furious. "Did you ever, ever, see such a thing?"

"I have still good hopes," resumed the Abbé, but evidently more with a view to consoling the worthy man than out of conviction; "the children must see her, the children must speak to her."

"She will not see them, she will not speak to them! It shall not be said that she was kind out of pity; no, she shall be kind out of kindness or I will have nothing to do with her? Let the children see her, let them speak to her? No, I should be ashamed of it. I do not want them to know that they have such a fool for a mother."

At this moment Bernard thrust an anxious head through the half-open door; Guillaume saw him, and turning to the Abbé said, "Say nothing about the old mule's obstinacy, I beg of you, Monsieur l'Abbé, I beg of you."

Bernard had noticed his father's look, and his subsequent silence by no means lessened the young man's uneasiness.

"Well, father?" he brought himself to ask in a timid voice.

"Who called you here?" said Guillaume.

"Father!" murmured the lad, almost beseechingly.

His son's tone went to old Watrin's heart; but he steeled that heart, and in a voice as rough as Bernard's had been soft and persuasive, said again, "I ask you, who called you here? Answer me that!"

"No one, I know, but I hoped——"

"Be off! you were a fool to hope."

"Father! dear father!" said Bernard, "one kind word! only one!"

"Be off, I say!"

"For God's sake, father!"

"Go away, I tell you!" cried Father Guillaume. "There is nothing for you to do here."

Indeed in the Watrin family every member had his dose of obstinacy.

Instead of allowing the cloud that was over his father's brow to disperse and coming back later on, as the latter advised him, somewhat brutally, it may be, Bernard came a step more forward in the room and continuing to insist, said in a firmer voice, "Father, mother is crying and will not answer; you are crying and you send me away. . . ."

"You are mistaken, I am not crying."

"Be calm, Bernard, be calm!" said the Abbé, "all may come right yet."

But instead of listening to the Abbé's voice, Bernard hearkened to the voice of despair, which began to ring in his heart.

"Alas, alas!" he muttered, thinking that his mother consented to the marriage and that it was his father who opposed it, "wretched man that I am! Twenty-five years have I loved my father and he does not love me."

"Wretched! Yes, wretched you are indeed," cried the Abbé, "for you are blaspheming now."

"But you see plainly that my father does not love me, Monsieur l'Abbé," replied Bernard, "since he refuses me the one and only thing that can make me happy."

"You hear him?" cried Guillaume, carried away by his old anger even more than any fresh resentment. "That is how you judge things! Oh youth! youth!"

"But," resumed Bernard, "it shall not be said that in obedience to an incredible caprice I abandon the poor girl;

if she has only one friend here, at least that friend will stand her in stead of all others."

"Oh, I have already told you three times to go away, Bernard!" cried Guillaume.

"I am going away," said the young man. "But I am five-and-twenty, five-and-twenty past; I am free to act, and what is refused me so cruelly, well the law gives me the right to take it and I will take it."

"The law!" cried Guillaume, exasperated. "I do believe, God forgive me, that a son has spoken of 'the law' to his father!"

"Is it my fault!"

"The law . . ."

"You drive me to extremities."

"The *law!* Out of the house! The *law* to your father! Out of the house, wretch, and never let me set eyes on you again! . . . the *law!*"

"Father," said Bernard, "I will go, since you turn me out; but remember the hour when you said to your son, 'Child, go out of my house!' and may all ill that results recoil on you!" And Bernard, taking his gun, dashed out of the house like a madman.

Père Guillaume was ready to spring forward and seize his weapon; but the Abbé held him back.

"What are you doing, Monsieur l'Abbé?" cried the old man. "Did you not hear what that scoundrel said just now?"

"Father, father!" murmured the Abbé, "you have been too hard on your son."

"Too hard," cried Guillaume, "do *you* say so too? Was it I who was too hard or his mother? You know which it was, and God knows. *Too hard*, when I had my eyes full of tears, as I talked to him: for I love him, or rather loved him, as one does an only child! But now," went on the old Forester in a choking voice, "let him go where he pleases, provided he does go! Let what may become of him, provided I do not see him again."

"Injustice breeds injustice, Guillaume," said the Abbé solemnly. "Beware, after having been severe in your anger of being unjust in cold blood. God has already

forgiven you the anger and your violence; he will not forgive you injustice."

The Abbé had scarcely finished when Catherine in her turn came pale and frightened into the parlour. Her large blue eyes were fixed, and from them fell great tears which rolled like pearls down her cheeks.

"O dear father!" said she, looking in alarm at the Abbé's sad face and the gloomy countenance of the Forester, "What is the matter; what has happened?"

"Good! here's the other come now!" muttered Guillaume, taking his pipe from his mouth and putting it back in his pocket, which with him was a sign of intense emotion.

"Bernard hugged me three times, crying," she went on; "he took his hat and his hunting-knife and made off, running like a maniac."

The Abbé turned round and wiped his wet eyes with his handkerchief.

"Bernard . . . Bernard is a scoundrel," retorted Guillaume, "and you—you——"

No doubt he was going to include Catherine in his maledictions, but his angry glance met the girl's soft and beseeching eyes, and what remained in him of anger melted like snow before an April sunbeam.

Then gently pushing his niece away and turning to the Abbé, "Monsieur Grégoire," he said, "it is true, I was harsh, it is the mother's fault. Go and try to put that right with her. As for me . . . as for me, I am going to take a turn in the forest. I have always noticed that shade and solitude are full of good counsels." And giving the Abbé a shake of the hand, but without daring to look in Catherine's direction, he left the house, crossed the road diagonally and plunged into the woodland opposite.

The Abbé, to avoid an explanation, would have much liked to do the same, and was proceeding towards the kitchen, went in, for he was almost sure to find Mother Watrin there, desperate as she might be, but Catherine stopped him.

"In the name of heaven, Monsieur l'Abbé, have pity on me," she said, "and tell me what has happened."

"My child," replied the worthy vicar, taking both the girl's hands, "you are so good, so pious, so devoted that you cannot have other than friends here and in heaven. Abide in hope therefore, accuse no one, and leave it to the goodness of God, to the prayers of the angels and the love of your kinsfolk the care of putting matters right."

"But I—I—what am I to do?" asked Catherine.

"Pray that a father and a son who have parted in anger and tears may meet again in pardon and joy."

And, leaving Catherine a little calmer, if not more reassured, he went into the kitchen where Mother Watrin, shaking her head and reiterating, "No, no, no!" all the time and crying withal, was skinning a couple of young rabbits and rolling her paste.

Catherine watched the Abbé Grégoire go away as she had watched her adopted father, understanding as little of the advice of the one as of the silence of the other.

"Oh, God!" she asked herself, "Will no one tell me what has happened? No one?"

"Yes, I will, with your permission, Mademoiselle Catherine," said Mathieu, suddenly coming into sight, his two elbows leaning on the window ledge.

This apparition of Mathieu was almost a joy to poor Catherine. Coming in some sort in the name of Bernard and to give her some news of Bernard, the vagabond seemed to lose half his repulsiveness in her eyes, and to be merely ugly.

"Oh, yes, yes," cried the girl, "tell me where Bernard is and why he has gone away."

"Bernard?"

"Yes, yes, my dear Mathieu, tell me, tell me! I am listening."

"Well, he has gone away . . . ha, ha!"

And Mathieu began to laugh his horselaugh while Catherine turned an anxious ear towards him.

"He has gone away," resumed the vagabond. "But there! had I better tell you?"

"Yes, yes, tell me; I beg you to."

"Well, he has gone far away because Monsieur Watrin turned him out of the house."

" Turned him out of the house! The father drove the son away? And why?"

" Why? Because he wanted to marry you in spite of every one, the madman!"

" Driven away? Driven away, because of me? Driven from his father's house?"

" Yes. Oh, I should think so. There were high words. Look you, I was in the bakehouse and heard everything. Oh, without listening. I did not listen, no, I didn't; but they were shouting so loud that I could not help hearing. There was even a moment when Monsieur Bernard said to Father Guillaume, 'It is on you the misfortunes will recoil, the calamities that are coming.' There was even a moment when I thought the old man was going to snatch up his gun. Oh, that would have been terrible, terrible! For you know Père Guillaume is not like me who cannot put a bullet into a house-door at twenty-five paces."

" Oh, Bernard! poor, poor Bernard!"

" Oh yes, what he risked for you well deserves that you should see him once more, does it not? if only to prevent his doing something."

" Oh yes, yes, see him again! I ask no better, but how?"

" He will be waiting for you this evening."

" Waiting for me?"

" Yes, that is what he told me to say."

" Who told you?"

" Who? why! he of course."

" And where will he wait for me?"

" By the Prince's spring."

" At what time?"

" At nine o'clock."

" I shall be there, Mathieu, I shall be there."

" Do not fail, whatever you do!"

" I will not fail."

" Else I should catch it. He's not soft-handed, you know, is friend Bernard. This morning he reached me such a cuff my cheek smarts still. But I am a good-natured lad, I am, and do not bear malice."

"Never mind, my good Mathieu," said Catherine as she went up again to her room. "Oh, God will reward you for it."

"I hope so, indeed," said Mathieu, following her with his eyes till the door closed on her.

Then, indeed, with the smile of a fiend who sees a poor innocent soul falling into his trap, he turned in the direction of the forest, which he entered, with long strides, making signals all the time.

In reply to these signals a horseman, standing some distance off, hurried up.

"Well?" he asked Mathieu, pulling up his horse short opposite the vagabond.

"Well, all is going famously, the other has done such a lot of foolish things that it appears we have had enough of it as it is; and then we regret Paris."

"What am I to do?"

"What had you better do?"

"Yes."

"Will you do it?"

"Of course."

"Well, go quickly to Villers-Cotterets and stuff your pockets with money. At eight o'clock be at the Corcy fête, and at nine . . ."

"At nine?"

"Well, some one who was not able to speak to you this morning, some one who did not come back by Gondreville simply for fear of a scandal, that some one will be waiting for you at the Prince's spring."

"Then she consents to go away with me?" asked the Parisian, overjoyed.

"She consents to everything," said the vagabond.

"Mathieu," rejoined the young man, "there are twenty-five louis for you if you have not lied to me. Till this evening at nine."

And driving his spurs into his horse's sides he went off at a gallop in the direction of Villers-Cotterets.

"Twenty-five louis," muttered Mathieu, watching him vanish among the trees, "it's a pretty penny, without counting my revenge! Oh, I am an owl, and the owl is a

bird of ill omen! Monsieur Bernard, the owl wishes you good evening."

And putting his two hands to his mouth he gave the owl's cry and voice. "Good evening, Monsieur Bernard!"

And he plunged into the thickest of the forest in the direction of the village of Corcy.

CHAPTER XIV

THE VILLAGE FÊTE

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, at the period that is when the events occurred which we have undertaken to relate, the fêtes of the various villages in the neighbourhood of Villers-Cotterets were true red-letter days, not only for those villages themselves, but likewise for the town from which they radiate like satellites round their parent planets.

It was particularly in the early part of the year, when the earliest fêtes coincided with the first fine days, when by the young beams of a May sun one or other of these villages awoke chattering and singing under the forest leaves like a brood of field-warblers or tomtits just hatched,—it was more particularly at that moment, we say, that the fête offered a special charm, a double attraction.

Then, a fortnight beforehand in the village, for a week before in the town, began preparations of coquetry on the part of all those to whom fell, whether for interest, speculation or pleasure, a share of any kind in the celebration.

The taverns polished their tables, scoured their window-panes, furbished up their pewter tankards and put new bushes at their doors.

The fiddlers swept, weeded, and trod smooth the appointed dancing place. Improvised booths arose under the trees, like the tents, not of a field of battle, but of a pleasure-camp. Lastly, young men and maidens looked to their toilettes, just as before a grand review the soldiers who are to take part in it look to their arms.

On the morning of this famous day all were awake early, all were astir and moving and making ready from dawn.

The tilting rings fixed their revolving mechanism; the open air merry-go-rounds were secured on their four halting feet; the plaster dolls intended to be broken by the cross-bow bolts were set in line on their stakes; the rabbits waited dolefully, frightened and with ears dropped on their necks, for the hour when a ring cunningly threaded on a stake would decide their fate and send them from the dealer's basket into the saucepan of the happy winner.

Thus for the village folk the fête was a holiday indeed from earliest dawn. Not so with the representatives the town was to send to the festival. These did not set out till towards three or four in the afternoon, unless private invitations or ties of kinship with the farmers or principal inhabitants of the village changed their usual customs.

Towards three or four in the afternoon then, according as the village was more or less far from the town, a long procession began to wind along the road. It was composed of "fashionables" on horseback, aristocrats in carriages, and members of the Third Estate on foot.

These members of the Third Estate were lawyers' clerks, shopmen or superior working-men, each having on his arm a pretty girl in a hat with pink or blue ribbons, defying with her smart muslin skirts, her bright eyes and her white teeth, fine ladies who dashed so disdainfully past her in their carriages.

At five o'clock every one was at the meeting-place and the festival had its true significance, for it contained the three constituent elements, aristocrats, townspeople and peasants. All these danced in the same enclosure, it is true, yet without mingling; each caste formed its own quadrille, and if one of these was enviable and envied, it was that of the *grisettes* with their pink and blue ribbons.

Towards nine o'clock in the evening the dancers began to thin out. All who belonged to the town took the road to the town again, the aristocrats in carriages, clerks, shopmen, workmen and girls on foot. It was these long homeward wendings under the shade of the great trees, the sifted

beams of the moon, the first warm breezes of the year, that were so charming and so delightful.

These fêtes, of course, were more or less frequented according to the importance of the villages or their more or less picturesque situation. In this respect Corcy was in the first rank. Nothing was more delightful than this little village, lying at the mouth of the Nadon valleys and forming an acute angle with the ponds of La Ramée and Javaye. At ten minutes' walk from the Corcy road in particular there is a spot of a very special beauty, at once lovely and wild; it is called the Prince's spring.

Let us recall here, by the bye, that it was beside this fountain that Mathieu had arranged a double meeting with the Parisian and Catherine, and then go back to Corcy.

From four in the afternoon then Corcy was in full holiday. Let us carry our readers not exactly into the middle of the fête, but to the door of one of the improvised taverns of which we spoke just now. This *cabaret*, which came to life again every year for three days of a short, ephemeral activity, was an old keeper's house now deserted, and which in consequence of this abandonment remained closed three hundred and sixty days in the year.

During the three days' holiday the Inspector placed the house at the disposal of a good woman known as Mother Tellier, a tavern-keeper at Corcy by trade, who made a branch of her establishment of it. The fête lasted three days, we say. Of the five days that we have deducted from the year the first forms the eve and the last the day after, that is to say the first represents the preparations for the fête and the last the necessary tidying-up which follows the same festive occasion. As long as the fête lasted the tavern lived and drank and sang, as if it were to go on doing so for ever. Then it reclosed for three hundred and sixty days to come, during which it remained sombre, silent, asleep, lethargic, to all appearance dead. It lay half-way between Corcy and the Prince's spring, so that it afforded a natural stopping-place to such as were going to the latter. And between the country dances, owing to the charm of the site and that need of solitude

so natural to lovers, everybody walked from the village to the fountain, and stopped at Mother Tellier's wine-shop to drink a glass and eat a wedge of cream cake. Towards five, six and seven o'clock, then, Mother Tellier's establishment was at the zenith of its splendour, then little by little it emptied, became more and more deserted, and generally towards ten in the evening closed its wooden eyelids and fell asleep under the watch of a girl named Babet, who took Mother Tellier's place and was honoured with all her confidence.

Next day from daybreak on it yawned at first at the door, then one after the other opened its two shutters and the same as the day before waited calmly for customers. The said customers preferred to take their places under a sort of rustic *pergola* formed outside the house by ivy vines and bind-weed, climbing all up the pillars which supported this projecting roof of verdure. Opposite, at the foot of a beech, a giant of a bygone age surrounded by his children, rose a bower of foliage under which the wine cooled during the day, being brought in at evening, the confidence of Mother Tellier in the sobriety and probity of her countrymen not going so far as to let the tempting liquor pass the night in the open air, cooling as it was compared with the air in the day-time.

Now towards seven in the evening, the very time when the fête itself presented its most animated appearance, Mother Tellier's tavern was likewise thronged with an animated gathering. This was composed of customers drinking wine at ten, twelve and fifteen sous the bottle (for Mother Tellier had three prices), and consumers of cream cakes and almond rock. Some that were more famished, however, went as far as bacon omelette, salad or sausage. Five tables out of six were occupied, and Mother Tellier and Mademoiselle Babet were scarcely sufficient to deal with the frequent calls of the customers.

At one of these tables were seated two of the keepers who had taken part in the morning in the hunting of the boar marked down by our friend François. The two were Bobineau and Lajeunesse.

Bobineau, a stout man and rotund, with eyes flush with

his head and a full-blown face, a native of Aix-en-Provence, very merry, passing his life in chaffing others and being chaffed by them, and speaking thickly like a true Provençal as he was, full of fire both in attack and defence, and in either case hitting on speeches which are quoted to this day, though he has been dead this fifteen years.

Lajeunesse, tall, dry and lean, christened by this juvenile name in 1784 by Duke Philippe Egalité of Orleans, because at that time he was the youngest of the keepers, had kept his nickname, although he had come to be nearly the oldest; he was as grave as Bobineau was laughter-loving, and as chary of words as the other was talkative.

To the left of the house on its east side were the remains of a hedge which perhaps had once formed a square as a sort of enclosure to the house, but which nowadays only extended five or six feet back as far as the leafy arbour, beyond which it disappeared, leaving access to the house perfectly free and open. Behind this hedge, in which was a gate, the solid portion being absent and only the two posts remaining, a sort of hillock, crowned by a great oak whose foot was hidden in moss, dominated the little valley where the Prince's spring rises.

Farther on, under the mysterious shade of the forest, on the carpet of moss which deadens all but the nearest footsteps, in the twilight which was now beginning to fall, passed, more and more dimly seen according to their greater or less degree of distance, a series of merry-makers, some walking singly, some in couples. Then as an accompaniment to the voices of the drinkers, eaters, skittle-players or loungers you heard the sound of the violins and the shrill pipe of clarionets which died down of one accord just enough to give time for the cavaliers to lead their ladies back to their seats, choose another lady and take their places again for another quadrille.

And now that our curtain is raised, that our scenery is rendered intelligible by explanation, let us take our readers under Mother Tellier's trellis-work. At this moment she is engaged in serving a Sybarite who has asked for a bacon omelette and wine at twelve sous, while Babet is carrying to Bobineau and Lajeunesse a piece of cheese

of the size of a brick which will help them to finish their second bottle of wine.

"Well, that is what it is," said Lajeunesse with his serious air to Bobineau, who, bending as far back as the other was projected forward, was listening to him with his most quizzical look. "And if you doubt it, you can go and see it with your own eyes. When I say your own, you understand that it is a way of speaking. The man you speak of is a new-comer, he is come from Germany, the country of Catherine's father, and is called Mildet."

"And where is he going to live, this fine fellow?" asked Bobineau with that charming Provençal accent which we have already said was peculiar to him.

"At the other end of the forest, at Montaigu; he has a little rifle no higher than that. Fifteen inches of barrel with a thirty bore and bullets like small shot. He will take a horse-shoe, nail it to the wall, and at fifty paces he will put a bullet into each of the holes, one after the other."

"Saints in Paradise," said Bobineau, uttering his usual oath, and laughing as he always did. "Why don't he turn farrier, that fine fellow; he would shoe his nags, and never fear a kick. When I see it, I'll believe it, eh, Molicar?"

This interpellation was addressed to a new-comer who, after knocking about Mathieu's skittles, made his entrance accompanied by the curses of the players, who threatened to kick his legs, which were pretty unsteady already, from under him as a finish to their game.

At his name the disciple of Bacchus turned round, and recognizing as through a mist the man who had so addressed him, "Ah," he mumbled, opening his eyes and rounding his mouth, "so it's you, Bobineau, is it?"

"Yes, it is I."

"And you were saying? Repeat a bit what you said, if you will be so kind."

"Nothing, a lot of rot; that funny fellow, Lajeunesse, is trying to pull my leg, that's all."

"But," put in Lajeunesse, his vanity as a story-teller wounded, "what I tell you . . ."

"By the bye, Molicar," resumed Bobineau, "what has become of your lawsuit with neighbour Lafarge?"

"My lawsuit?" asked Molicar, who in the somewhat confused state of mind in which he was had some difficulty in stepping from one idea to another.

"Yes, your lawsuit."

"With Lafarge, the periwig-maker?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I lost it."

"How did you lose it?"

"I lost it because I was cast in a fine."

"By whom?"

"By Monsieur Bassinot, the magistrate?"

"And what was your fine, eh?"

"Three francs."

"But what had you done to this Lafarge, the wig-maker?"

"What had I done to him?" asked Molicar, oscillating to and fro on his legs like a pendulum. "I damaged his nose. But without any bad intention, on my honour. You know Lafarge the wig-maker's nose well enough, don't you, Bobineau?"

"In the first place, please let us be accurate," said the merry Provençal; "it is not a nose, it's a handle."

"That's what it is! He has found the very word. Devil of a Bobiné. No, no; I mean to say, devil of a Bobineau. It's my tongue that's gone crooked."

"Well?" asked Lajeunesse.

"Well, what?" asked Molicar in his turn, whose wits were already wandering a hundred leagues from the conversation.

"He's asking for the history of Father Lafarge's nose."

"True, true. It was just a fortnight ago," went on Molicar, endeavouring by a gesture obstinately repeated to drive away a fly which did not exist, "we were coming out of the *cabaret* together."

"Then you were tipsy," remarked Bobineau.

"No, as true as I am a man," rejoined Molicar.

"I tell you you *were* tipsy."

"And I tell you we were not: we were *drunk*." And

Molicar burst out laughing; he had made a point too for once.

"That's all right!" remarked Bobineau.

"But you will never cure yourself?" queried Lajeunesse.

"Of what?"

"Of getting tipsy."

"Cure myself! What is the good?"

"This man is full of reason," said Bobineau. "A glass of wine, Molicar."

Molicar shook his head.

"What, you refuse?"

"Yes."

"You refuse a glass of wine, you?"

"Two or none at all."

"Bravo!"

"Why two?" asked Lajeunesse whose mind, more mathematical than Bobineau's, required a positive solution for everything.

"Because one only," said Molicar, "would make the thirteenth this evening."

"Oh, aye!" exclaimed Bobineau, "and thirteen glasses of wine would certainly bring me ill luck."

"Superstitious fellow, get out! Go on, you shall have two glasses."

"Well, we were coming out of the wine-shop," resumed Molicar, accepting Bobineau's invitation.

"What time was it?"

"Oh, quite early."

"Well anyhow?"

"It might be one o'clock or half-past one in the morning. I wanted to get home, as an honest man should who has three wives and a child."

"Three wives?"

"Three wives and a child."

"What a Bashaw to be sure!"

"Eh? No, no! a wife and three children; how stupid that Bobineau is. How can you have three wives? If I had had three, I should not have gone home. Often I do not go as it is because I find one too many."

"Well, then the foolish idea came into my head to say

to Lafarge the wigmaker, who lives in the Place de la Fontaine, whilst, as you know, I live at the top of the Rue de Largny, the silly idea took hold of me to say to him, 'Neighbour, let's see each other home. You will see me home first, I will see you home afterwards, then it will be your turn, then mine again, and on each trip we will stop at Mother Moreau's to drink a mug.' 'Ah,' said he, 'that's a good idea, that.'"

"Yes," put in Bobineau, "you had probably, like to-day, only taken thirteen glasses and you were afraid it might be unlucky."

"No, that day I had not counted them, and that is wrong, it will never happen again. We went off, then, together like two good friends, like two real neighbours, when on reaching Mademoiselle Chapins' door, you know, the postmistress."

"Yes."

"There was a big stone and it *was* dark! You have good eyes, haven't you, Lajeunesse? Well, that night you would have taken a cat for a keeper."

"Never," said Lajeunesse solemnly.

"Never? You say, never?"

"No, no, he says nothing."

"If he says nothing that's different and I am wrong."

"Yes, you are wrong, go on."

"When, on reaching Mademoiselle Chapins' door, the postmistress, I came across the stone. Poor wretch that I was, I never saw it. How should I see it? Neighbour Lafarge could not see his own nose, which is certainly nearer his eyes than my eyes ever were to the stone. I stumble, I put out my hand and save myself by whatever I could lay hold on. Good, it was neighbour Lafarge's nose. Lord, you know when you are drowning in water, you squeeze pretty tight, but when you are drowning in wine, it's ten times worse. Egad, sir! the same thing followed as when you draw your hunting-knife out of its sheath. Neighbour Lafarge drew his nose out of my hand, but as for the skin of his nose it remained in my hand. You see, of course, this was no fault of mine; and more by token I never refused to give it him back, his con-

founded skin. Well, the magistrate, he sentenced me to three francs damage and compensation for that."

"And neighbour Lafarge was mean enough to take them, the three francs?"

"Yes, but we have just been playing for them at bowls. I won them back and we drank them. My fourteenth glass, Bobineau?"

"Tell me, Father Bobineau," cried Mathieu, interrupting the talkers, "did not you say you were looking out for the Inspector?"

"No," replied Bobineau.

"I thought you did; and as he is coming this way I told you, that you might not have the trouble of going to look for him."

"In that case . . ." said Father Lajeunesse, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Well," said Bobineau, "what are you doing there?"

"I am paying for both. You will give it me back later on, it is just as well that the Inspector should not see us at a tavern table; because of a glass of wine that one takes by chance he would think that we made a habit of it. It is thirty-four sous, isn't it, Mother Tellier?"

"Yes, gentlemen," said she.

"Well, there they are. See you again."

"Oh, the cowards!" said Molicar, sitting down at the table which they had just vacated, and holding up to the setting sun a third bottle scarcely broached; "the cowards to leave the field of battle while there are enemies left." And filling the two glasses to the brim and chinking them against each other he cried, "Your health, Molicar!"

Meanwhile the two keepers, in a hurry as they were to get out of sight, had propped themselves against each other and were looking in stupefaction at a new personage who had just come on the scene.

The new-comer was Bernard, but Bernard pale and dishevelled, his neck-tie flying and his brow covered with sweat.

CHAPTER XV

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

THE young man was so changed that his two comrades looked at him for a moment before they recognized him. Then at last Lajeunesse chanced it and said, "Why, it's Bernard. Good day, Bernard!"

"Good day," replied he shortly, visibly annoyed at finding them there.

"So you are here, are you?" ventured Bobineau in his turn.

"And why not? May not a fellow come to the fête when he wants a little amusement?"

"Oh, I don't say he may not come," rejoined Bobineau, "only, Saints above! I *am* astonished to see you alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"And whom do you expect me to be with?"

"Why, I fancy when one has a sweetheart, a young and pretty sweetheart . . ."

"Say no more about it," said Bernard frowning.

Then striking a table with the butt of his gun, "Wine!" he cried.

"Hush!" said Lajeunesse.

"Why hush?"

"The Inspector is here."

"Well, what of it?"

"I tell you, be careful, the Inspector is here, that's all."

"Well, what does it matter to me whether he is here or not, the Inspector?"

"Oh, in that case it's another matter."

"There is trouble in the household," said Bobineau to Lajeunesse, touching him on the arm.

Lajeunesse signed to him that that was his opinion too, then turning towards Bernard:

"What I was saying, look you, Bernard," he went on,

" was not to lecture you or make myself disagreeable. But you know the Inspector does not like to see us in the wine-shop."

" And how if I like to go there ? " rejoined Bernard. " Do you think it is the Inspector that will keep me from doing what I wish." Then knocking a second time on the table, yet more violently than the first, " Wine ! " he cried, " wine ! "

The two keepers now saw that he had made up his mind.

" Come, come ! " said Bobineau, " you must not prevent a fool from acting after his folly. Come along, Lajeunesse."

" Let us say no more," said Lajeunesse. " Good-bye, Bernard ! "

The two keepers went off in the opposite direction to that in which the Inspector was coming, who besides was so absorbed in his conversation, and was so short-sighted that he passed the wine-shop without seeing either them or Bernard.

" Well, is anybody coming ? " cried the latter, giving the table a blow with the butt which almost made it fly in pieces.

Mère Tellier came running, a bottle in each hand, and not knowing yet what impatient customer was calling for wine so violently.

" Here ! here ! here ! " said she, " our stock of wine in bottle is run out, and it took time to draw fresh from the cask." Then, at last recognizing with whom she had to deal, " Ah, it's you," she said. " Dear Monsieur Bernard. Gracious ! how pale you are ! "

" You think so, Mother ? " said the young man. " Well, that's why I want to drink. Wine gives one colour."

" But you are ill, Monsieur Bernard," insisted she.

Bernard shrugged his shoulders and snatching one of the bottles from her hand said, " Give it here."

And putting the bottle to his lips he took a long drink from it.

" Good Lord ! " cried the worthy woman, watching this act of his in bewilderment, so unlike his usual ways, " you will do yourself harm, my child."

" No," replied he, sitting down and putting the bottle violently on the table, " let me drink that one. Who knows if you will ever serve me with another ? "

Mother Tellier's stupefaction went on increasing, she forgot all her other customers to attend only to the young man. " Why, what has happened, dear Monsieur Bernard ? " she insisted.

" Nothing ; only give me pen, ink and paper."

" Pen, ink and paper ? "

" Yes, get on."

Mother Tellier hastened to comply.

" Pen, ink and paper," echoed Molicar, more and more drunk, and finishing Lajeunesse and Bobineau's third bottle.

" Excuse me, Mr. Notary. Do people come to a wine-shop to ask for pens, ink and paper ? They come here to call for wine."

Then adding example to precept, " Wine, Mother Tellier, bring me some wine ! " he cried.

Meanwhile Mother Tellier, leaving Babet to serve Molicar, had come back to Bernard and put before him the three things asked for. Bernard looked up at her and noticed she was dressed in black.

" Why are you in mourning ? " asked he.

The good woman turned pale in her turn, and in a half stifled voice said, " Ah, God, have you forgotten the great calamity that befell me ? "

" I don't remember anything about it," was the reply. " Why are you in mourning ? "

" Why, you know quite well, my good Monsieur Bernard ; you came to his funeral yourself. I am in mourning for my poor child Antoine, who died a month ago."

" Oh, poor woman."

" I had none but him, Monsieur Bernard, an only son, and yet the Lord took him from me all the same. Oh, I miss him sadly. When a mother has had her boy twenty years under her eyes, and suddenly he is gone, what can she do ? Weep ? Yes ! but what is the good of weeping ? Lost is lost."

And the good woman burst into sobs.

Molicar chose the moment to strike up a song: it was his favourite song and the test of how much liquor the good man had on board. When he began that song, it showed he was really drunk.

He began:

"Had I but in my orchard
A single square of vines."

This song, breaking in to insult Mother Tellier's grief, a grief for which Bernard felt deeply beneath his assumed indifference, made him spring up as if grief had struck him with a spur as new as unexpected.

"Will you be quiet?" cried he.

But Molicar, paying no heed to Bernard's prohibition, resumed:

"Had I but in my orchard . . ."

"Hold your tongue, I tell you," said the young man with a threatening gesture.

"And why should I hold my tongue?" asked Molicar.

"Don't you hear what this woman is saying? Don't you see that there is a mother here weeping, and weeping for her son?"

"That's true," said Molicar, "I will sing quite low." And he began again in an undertone:

"Had I . . ."

"Neither low nor high!" shouted Bernard. "Stop or be off."

"Oh," says the other, "very well, I will go away. I like taverns where people laugh and not where they cry. Mother Tellier, Mother Tellier," cried he, beating on the table, "come and fetch your due."

"All right," says Bernard, "I will settle your account. Leave us!"

"Good!" cried Molicar, staggering, "I ask no better."

And he went away, holding on by the trees and singing more loudly the farther away he got:

"Had I but in my orchard
A single square of vines."

Bernard watched him depart with profound disgust, then coming back to the landlady, who was still weeping,

" Yes, you are right," he said, " what is lost is lost ; look, Mother Tellier, I would like to be in the place of your son and for your son not to be dead."

" Oh, God keep you ! " cried the worthy woman, " you, Monsieur Bernard ? "

" Yes I, on my word of honour."

" You who have such good, kind relatives ! " went on she. " Ah, if you knew how it hurts a mother to lose her child, you would not venture on such a wish."

Meanwhile Bernard was trying to write, but in vain his hand shook so much that he could not form a letter.

" Oh, I cannot, I cannot," cried he, crushing the pen against the table.

" Sure enough," said the good woman, " you are trembling as if you had the fever."

" Here," said Bernard, " do me a service, Mother Tellier."

" Oh, very willingly, Monsieur Bernard ! " cried she. " What is it ? "

" It is only a step from here to the *Maison Neuve* on the Soissons Road, is it not ? "

" A quarter of an hour's smart walk, that's all."

" Then do me a friendly turn. I am very sorry to give you the trouble."

" Tell me, never mind."

" Do me the kindness to go over there and ask for Catherine."

" Has she come back, then ? "

" Yes, this morning. And to tell her that I will write to her soon."

" That you will write to her soon ? "

" To-morrow, as soon as I've mastered this trembling."

" You are leaving the neighbourhood, then ? "

" They say we are going to have war with the Algerians."

" What is that to you, war, to you who have drawn in the conscription and got a lucky number ? "

" You will go where I asked you, will you not, Mother Tellier ? "

" Yes, directly, Monsieur Bernard, but . . ."

" But what ? "

" To your parents ? "

"Well, what of my parents?"

"What do you wish me to say to them?"

"To them?"

"Yes."

"Nothing."

"What? Nothing?"

"No, nothing, unless that I passed this way, that they won't see me again, and that I bid them good-bye."

"Good-bye!" echoed Mère Tellier.

"Tell them also to keep Catherine with them, that I shall be grateful to them for any kindness they may show her, and then besides that if by chance I should die, like your poor Antoine, I beg them to make Catherine their heiress."

And the young man, at the end of his fever-fit and therefore of his strength, with a sigh that was much like a sob, let his head fall between his two hands.

Mother Tellier looked at him with deep pity.

"Well, well, no need to say any more, Monsieur Bernard," she went on. "Here is the night quite fallen; I shall not have many more people now; Babet will be equal to the serving, and I will run to the *Maison Neuve*."

Then to herself she added, "I think it is the best service I can do him, poor boy!"

In the distance was still heard the vinous voice of Molicar singing:

"Had I but in my orchard
A single square of vines."

Bernard remained for some moments plunged in his reflections, reflections painful and deep which betrayed themselves by the convulsive heaving of his shoulders, then at last lifting his face he shook his head and said to himself, "Come, courage, another glass of wine and let us be off."

"Oh, but, all the same," exclaimed a voice behind Bernard, the sound of which made him start, "I should not go away like that if I were you."

Bernard turned round, though strictly speaking he had no occasion to do so. He had recognized the voice.

"It's you, Mathieu?" he said.

"Yes, it is I," replied the other.

"What were you saying?"

"You did not hear? Well, your ear is dull."

"I heard, but I did not understand."

"Well then, I will repeat it."

"Do so."

"I said that if I were you I should not go away like that."

"You would not go away?"

"No, at least without . . . That'll do, I know what I mean."

"Without what? Let us hear."

"Well, without having my revenge on one or the other. There, the big word is out."

"Who? What? One or the other?"

"Yes, one or the other, him or her."

"Can I take revenge on my father or my mother?" cried Bernard, shrugging his shoulders.

"Come now! Your father or your mother! What have they to do with all this?"

"But of whom are you talking then?"

"Well, of the Parisian and Mademoiselle Catherine."

"Catherine and Monsieur Chollet!" said Bernard, springing to his feet as if a viper had stung him.

"Why, yes."

"Mathieu! Mathieu!"

"Good, that warns me to say nothing."

"Why so?"

"Why, because what I might say would recoil on myself."

"No, no, Mathieu: no, I swear to you. Speak!"

"But do you not guess then?" replied he.

"What do you expect me to guess? Come, I say it again, speak!"

"Oh, faith," went on the vagabond, "it is not worth while having brains and education if you are to be deaf and blind."

"Mathieu!" said Bernard, "have you seen or heard anything?"

"The owl sees plainly at night," said Mathieu, "she has

her eyes open when others have them shut. She watches while others sleep."

"Here now," repeated Bernard, trying to moderate his voice, "what have you seen and heard? Do not keep me in suspense any longer, Mathieu."

"Well then," rejoined the other, "the hindrance to your marriage,—for there is a hindrance, is there not?"

"Yes, what then?"

"Do you know where it comes from?"

The sweat ran from Bernard's brow.

"From my father," he said.

"From your father? Oh, yes, to be sure. He would ask no better than to see you happy. He loves you, poor dear man."

"Oh! So then the obstacle comes from some one who does not love me?"

"Ecod!" went on Mathieu without his wall-eye losing a single one of the varied emotions which chased each other over Bernard's countenance, "Ecod! you know there are sometimes people who only make believe to love you, who say, 'my dear Bernard, this, my dear Bernard, that,' and who at bottom deceive you."

"Come now, whom does the hindrance come from, my good Mathieu, whom does it come from? Say."

"Yes, that you may spring at my throat and throttle me."

"No, no, as sure as my name is Bernard, I swear it."

"Meanwhile," said Mathieu, "let me get a little away from you."

And he took two steps backward. Then feeling himself more secure at that distance, "Well," he said, "don't you see that the hindrance comes from Mademoiselle Catherine?"

Bernard turned livid, but did not move.

"From Catherine?" he rejoined. "You said there was some one who did not love me; do you want to make out that Catherine does not love me, by any chance?"

"I make out," said Mathieu, becoming emboldened by Bernard's assumed calm, "that there are girls, especially when they have had a taste of Paris, who prefer to be the

mistress of a rich young man at Paris rather than the wife of a poor young man in a country village."

"You are not saying that about Catherine and the Parisian, I hope?"

"Ho, ho!" said Mathieu, "who knows?"

"Wretch!" cried Bernard, flinging himself on Mathieu at a single bound and seizing him by the throat with both hands.

"There, what did I tell you?" cried he, in a stifled voice, and making vain efforts to shake off the grip of iron. "There, you are choking me, Monsieur Bernard. Monsieur Bernard, by all that's holy, I will tell you no more."

Bernard wanted to know all.

Whoever has dipped his lips in the bitter cup of jealousy, is fain to drink it out from froth to dregs.

So he let Mathieu go and his two arms fell inert.

"Mathieu," he said, "I beg your pardon. Speak, speak,—but if you lie!"

And his fists clenched and his arms stiffened.

"Well, if I lie, then it will be time for you to get into a rage. But as you get savage to begin with, I shall not speak another word."

"I was wrong," rejoined Bernard, forcing his features to express calm, though all the vipers of jealousy were biting at his heart.

"Well, that is right, you are reasonable now," said Mathieu.

"Yes."

"But no matter," went on the vagabond.

"How, no matter?"

"Yes, I would show you; I prefer to make you touch the thing. Ah, you are of the breed of St. Thomas the doubter, you are."

"Yes, you are right; show me, Mathieu, show me."

"Very well, I am willing."

"You are willing?"

"But on one condition."

"What is it?"

"That you give me your word of honour to see it out to the end."

"To the end. Yes, on my word of honour. But when shall I know that I am at the end? When shall I know that I have seen all?"

"Faith, when you have seen Mademoiselle Catherine and Monsieur Chollet at the Prince's spring."

"Catherine and Monsieur Chollet at the Prince's spring!" cried Bernard.

"Yes."

"And when shall I see that, Mathieu?"

"It is eight o'clock. Eight and how much past? Look at your watch, Monsieur Bernard."

Bernard drew out his watch with a hand that had become firm. As the struggle came close, the strong man recovered his nerve and strength.

"A quarter to nine," he said.

"Well then, in a quarter of an hour," rejoined Mathieu. "It is not very long, is it?"

"At nine o'clock, then," replied Bernard, passing his hand over his forehead covered with sweat.

"At nine o'clock, yes."

"Catherine and the Parisian at the Prince's spring?" said Bernard, in a low tone, remaining incredulous in spite of Mathieu's asseveration. "What should they be doing there?"

"Lord, I know nothing about it," replied he, for he did not miss a word of Bernard's, not a change of his countenance, not a quiver of his heart, "arranging their departure, maybe."

"Their departure?" cried Bernard, pressing his head between his hands as if he were going out of his senses.

"Yes," said Mathieu. "This evening at Villers-Cotterets the Parisian was getting together all the gold he could collect."

"All the gold he could collect?"

"Yes, he was asking everybody for it."

"Mathieu," muttered Bernard, "you make me suffer terribly; if it is for the pleasure of making me suffer, look out for yourself."

"Hush!" said Mathieu.

"The sound of horse-hoofs," said Bernard.

Mathieu laid one hand on Bernard's arm, and extending the other in the direction of the noise, said, "Look!"

And Bernard saw through the trees and the dim light a horseman approaching, whom his instinctive hatred made him instantly recognize as his rival. An impulse as instinctive made him spring behind the tree that stood nearest.

CHAPTER XVI

OPPORTUNITY MAKES THE THIEF

THE young man pulled up some fifty yards from Mère Tellier's wine-shop, looked about him, and seeing nothing to alarm him jumped off his horse and tied him to a tree. Then, after again casting a scrutinizing glance into the darkness, he advanced towards the wine-shop.

"Ah, there he is," muttered Bernard. "He is coming."

And he made as if to throw himself in his path. But Mathieu stopped him. "Take care," he said, "if he sees you, you will see nothing."

"Oh, yes, yes, you are right," replied Bernard, and he moved round the tree to get to the side where it threw its shadow, while Mathieu glided under the arbour like the serpent whose part he had just been playing.

The young man continued to go forward, and soon was within the circle of light thrown by the candles still standing on the different tables, though the customers of these had gradually dispersed. The wine-shop was or seemed to be deserted. Louis Chollet could thus believe himself quite alone.

"Faith," he said, noting the different objects which met his view, "I am almost sure that this is Mère Tellier's wine-shop, but devil take me if I know where the Prince's spring is!"

Bernard was so close to him that, low as he spoke, he had heard all.

"The Prince's spring," he repeated. And he looked about him in search of Mathieu. But he had vanished,

from his sight at least. He was under the trellis-work.

"Hi, Mother Tellier!" called Chollet, "Mother Tellier!"

The girl whom we have seen helping Mère Tellier in serving in the wine-shop, and who we said was called Babet, came out at his summons.

"You are calling Mother Tellier, Monsieur Chollet?" she asked.

"Yes, my girl," replied he.

"Bless us, she is not here. She is gone to the *Maison Neuve*, on the Soissons Road, to the Watrins'."

"The deuce," exclaimed the young man. "If only she does not go and come across Catherine and prevent her from coming."

"Meet Catherine and prevent her from coming!" echoed Bernard, who lost not a word of what the Parisian said.

"Oh, bah!" added the young man, "there is not much chance of it."

Then calling Babet, "Come here, child," he said.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"Perhaps you can direct me to what I am looking for."

"Tell me, Monsieur."

"The Prince's spring, is it far from here now?"

"Oh, no. It is there, Monsieur," replied the girl. "A hundred paces at most from here."

"A hundred paces!'

The girl pointed to the oak which stood outside the gate. "See," she said, "from the foot of that oak you can see it."

"Show it me, my girl."

The girl mounted the hillock on the summit of which stood a magnificent oak, of the time of Francis I., which had remained standing while twelve generations of trees had passed away.

"Look," said she, "yonder under the moonlight, that thread of water which shines like a skein of silver, that is the Prince's spring."

"Thank you, my girl," said the young man.

"There is no occasion for it."

"Oh, but there is, and to prove it here is something for your trouble."

And Louis Chollet, whom happiness made generous, drew out his purse all swelling with gold to take a piece of money from it. But the overloaded purse escaped from his hands and falling to the ground let out a part of the sum it contained.

"Good," said Chollet, "here I am letting my purse fall!"

"Wait," said Babet, "you shall have a light; there's no need to sow your money about, Monsieur Chollet; it does not give a crop."

"Oh," murmured Bernard, who had started at the noise made by the purse in falling, "it was the truth then!"

At this moment Babet came back with a candle and lowering it towards the ground set a hundred gold pieces scattered on the sand sparkling, whilst through the meshes of the long purse you could see double that sum glittering.

Chollet knelt down and began picking up the gold. If he had been less absorbed in this occupation, he might have seen Mathieu's frog-like head emerging from the shed, the eyes fixed and glowing.

"Oh, there's gold for you!" he muttered. "When one thinks there are people who have all that money, while there are others . . ."

Chollet made a movement and Mathieu's head went back under the shed as a tortoise's goes back into his shell.

The young man had finished his golden gleaning. He took the last twenty-franc piece, and instead of putting it back in the purse with the others, gave it to Babet.

"Thank you, my lass," he said, "this is for you."

"A twenty-franc?" cried the girl, delighted. "But you are making a mistake, all that is not for me."

"But it is, it will be a beginning to your dowry."

The vibrations of the village clock were now heard.

"What o'clock is that?" asked the Parisian.

"Nine," replied the child.

"Oh, good, I thought I was behindhand."

And laying his hand on his chest to make sure that the purse was all right in the breast pocket of his coat, for the

waistcoat pocket would not have been large enough to hold it, he ascended the little eminence, leant a moment against the oak to look about him and, descending towards the little glen where the fountain flows, vanished.

"Ah," muttered the young girl, admiring the gold piece by the light of her candle. "There's luck! Those are the people for me that are rich and generous too!"

And she went back into the house. Then as if there was no chance of seeing any more custom come, she closed the two shutters one after another and after them the door, of which the lock and the two bolts could be heard successively creaking.

Bernard remained alone in the darkness or, rather, thought himself so. He had forgotten about Mathieu. He stood there leaning his shoulder against a beech, his brows frowning painfully, one hand on his heart, the other gripping the barrel of his gun.

Mathieu surveyed him through an opening that he had made in the branches of the shed. You would have said he was turned into a statue, so motionless and still did he remain for a moment or two.

Then at last he appeared to rouse himself and, looking about him, murmured, "Mathieu! Mathieu!"

The vagabond took care not to answer him. Only, since the change in Bernard's voice told him what trouble he was a prey to, his watchfulness redoubled.

"Ah!" said Bernard presently, "he is gone. He must have been frightened by what he saw was likely to happen. If Catherine comes to the rendezvous, he will be proved right."

And leaving the shadow of the beech-tree he took hastily several steps in the direction followed by his rival.

But, checking himself all of a sudden, he said, "After all, there are others besides Catherine that this young man may be in love with. How do I know that Mathieu is not mistaken and that the girl he has appointed to meet is not some one from Villers-Hellon, Corcy or Longpont? At any rate we shall see for certain: I am here for that."

Then as his legs began to fail him, "Come," he said to himself, "courage, Bernard! It is better to know how

things really are than to be in doubt. Oh, Catherine," he went on as he reached the oak in his turn, " oh, if you are false to that extent, if you have deceived me so vilely, I shall cease to believe in anything, anything whatever in the world. Oh God ! I who loved her so, I who loved her so deeply, so sincerely, I who would have given my life for her if she had asked it of me ! "

And looking about him with an unspeakable air of menace, he went on, " Happily everybody is gone away, the lights are out, and if anything happens, it will be between the night, them and myself."

Then with a noiseless step, the step of the wolf as he approaches the sheepfold, he softly made his way to the foot of the oak and creeping over the roots reached the trunk. Once there he drew a long breath.

The Parisian was still alone. Bernard, with his gun ready, like a sportsman on the look-out, alert, his glance fixed, let not a movement of his rival escape him.

" Good," he said to himself, casting his eyes round as much of the horizon as he could command, " the girl he is waiting for must come, it would seem, from the direction of the Soissons Road. How if I went to meet her ? If I shamed her ? No, I should learn nothing ; she would lie."

Then suddenly turning his head in the opposite direction, " A noise that way," he said. " No, it is his horse getting restive and stamping his foot. Besides," he added indifferently, " what does a noise that comes from that quarter matter to me ? No, it is the other way that my eyes must watch, that my ears must listen. My God ! I see something like a shadow through the trees ! But no."

Bernard wiped his bedimmed eyes.

" Why, yes," he went on with an intonation so deep and sombre it evidently came from the very depths of his chest, " yes, it is a woman. She stops and hesitates ! No, she comes on. She is going to cross a clearing and then I shall see her plainly."

There was a moment's silence, then a sort of roar was heard.

" Oh, it is Catherine," gnashed Bernard. " I saw her. He is getting up. Oh, he shall not get as far as her ! "

At these words he raised himself on his knee, muttering, "Catherine! Catherine! May the blood I am about to shed fall back on your head!"

And he slowly brought the piece to his shoulder. Thrice the cheek of the young keeper sank onto the butt of the weapon, thrice his finger was on the trigger, but each time finger and cheek were withdrawn.

Then at last, the sweat upon his brow, a veil of blood over his eyes, his breast panting, he murmured, "No! no! I am not a murderer! I am Bernard Watrin, that is to say an honourable man. Help! My God, my God, help me!"

And throwing his gun far from him he fled frantically through the wood without knowing where he was going.

Then once more there was silence for a moment and the demon who inspired the project might see Mathieu put his head out of the trellis-work, creep with bated breath to the foot of the oak, peer in his turn in the direction of the Prince's spring, stretch out his hand in search of the gun that Bernard had thrown away, and seizing it with a convulsive hand, murmur, "Well, faith, so much the worse for him! Why does he carry so much gold? Opportunity makes the thief."

And in his turn Mathieu took aim at the young Parisian.

A flash illumined the night, a detonation rang out, and Louis Chollet fell with a cry. Another cry answered his; it was uttered by Catherine, who had halted in confusion on finding the Parisian where she expected to find her lover, and who fled in consternation on seeing Bernard's rival fall.

CHAPTER XVII

AT PÈRE WATRIN'S

WHILE this nocturnal tragedy, which the eye of God alone saw, was being played out by the Prince's spring, the dinner which was intended to display before the eyes of the Maire the culinary talents of Mère Watrin

was drawing to a close, saddened by the absence of Bernard.

Half-past eight struck by the cuckoo-clock. The Abbé Grégoire, who had already two or three times made as if to depart, made as if to rise for the last time.

But it was not Père Watrin's way to let his guest go away like that.

"Oh, no, no, Monsieur l'Abbé," said he, "not before you have drunk a last health!"

"But," said the mother, who was uneasy and whose moist eyes had not for an instant lost sight of Bernard's vacant place, "Catherine and François ought to be here."

She did not venture to speak of Bernard, though it was of him she was thinking all the time.

"Well now, where are they?" asked Watrin, "they were here just now."

"Yes, but they went out one after the other and they say it is unlucky to clink glasses at the end of a meal in the absence of those who were present when it began."

"Well, Catherine cannot be far off: call her, wife."

Mère Watrin shook her head.

"I *have* called her," said she, "and she did not answer."

"It is nearly ten minutes since she went away," said the Abbé.

"Have you looked in her room?" asked Mathieu.

"Yes, she is not there."

"And François?"

"Oh, as for François," said the Maire, "we know where to find him. He has gone to help put the chaise to."

"Monsieur Guillaume," said the Abbé, "we will pray God to forgive us for having proposed a toast in the absence of two of the guests. But it is getting late and I must leave you."

"Wife," said Watrin, "fill M. le Maire's glass and let us all do justice to our dear Abbé."

The Abbé raised his glass one-third full and in that gentle and soft voice in which he addressed God and the poor said, "to internal concord, to the unity of father and mother, husband and wife, the only unity from which the happiness of the children can result!"

"Bravo, Abbé!" cried the Maire.

"Thank you, sir," said Père Guillaume, "and may the heart that you desire to touch not remain deaf to your voice!" And a look cast at Marianne showed that this wish was uttered for her behoof.

"And now, my dear Guillaume," said the Abbé, "you will not take it amiss if I look for my cloak, hat and stick, and urge M. le Maire to take me back to town. Nine o'clock is going to strike."

"Yes, look for your traps, Abbé," said the Maire, "and while you are looking for them, I will say a last word of my own to Father Watrin."

"Come, Monsieur l'Abbé," said Marianne, whom the worthy priest's toast had rendered pensive, "I believe your belongings are in the next room."

"I follow you, Madame Watrin," replied he.

And he went out after her. At that moment nine o'clock struck. Guillaume and the Maire remained alone together.

A moment of silence ensued; each of them seemed to be waiting for the other to venture on the first word. It was Guillaume who risked it.

"Well, M. le Maire," he said, "let's have a look at your recipe for becoming a millionaire."

"First," replied the Maire, "a grip of the hand in token of good friendship, dear Monsieur Guillaume."

"Oh, that with pleasure."

And the two men who were on either side of the table reached out their hands which met over the remains of the famous pie that had so exercised Père Watrin.

"And now," said Guillaume, "I am waiting for your proposal."

The Maire coughed.

"You get already seven hundred and fifty-six livres salary a year, do you not?"

"And a hundred and fifty livres in perquisites, or nine hundred in all."

"So that it takes you ten years to receive nine thousand francs."

"You count like an Arithmetic book, Monsieur Raisin."

"Well then, Père Guillaume," went on the Maire, "what

you earn in ten years I offer to make you earn in three hundred and sixty-five days."

"Ah! Let us see a bit how that is," said Père Guillaume, resting his two elbows on the table and supporting his head with his two hands.

"Well," went on the Maire with a sly laugh, "all that you have to do is to shut alternatively the right eye and the left as you pass by certain trees that stand to the right or left of my lot. It is very easy, look you, that is all that has to be done."

And sure enough with an extreme facility the honest wood-merchant closed the one and the other eye successively.

"Oh, I see!" said Guillaume, looking at him steadily, "so that is your method, is it?"

"Why," replied the timber-merchant, "it seems to me it is as good as another."

"And you will give me nine thousand francs for that?"

"Four thousand five hundred francs for the right eye and four thousand five hundred for the left."

"And in the meantime you . . ." And Père Guillaume made the motion of a man felling a tree.

"And in the meantime I . . ." replied the timber-merchant, going through the same motion.

"In the meantime, you will be robbing the Duke of Orleans."

"Oh, robbing, robbing," said Raisin, grinning in spite of the gravity of the word, "there are so many trees in the forest nobody knows the number of them."

"Yes," said Guillaume with a certain gravity that was almost threatening, "except Him who knows not only the number of the trees, but that of the leaves as well, except Him who sees and hears everything, and knows already. though we are alone here, that you have just made me an infamous proposition."

"Monsieur Guillaume!" cried the Maire, thinking by raising his voice to impress the old head-keeper.

But Guillaume rose and resting his hand on the table, while with the other he pointed the wood-merchant to the window, said, "Do you see that window?"

"What then?" asked the Maire, turning pale, partly with fear, partly with anger.

"Well," replied Guillaume, "if this was not my house, if we had not just been eating at the same table, you would have been head-first through that window by this time!"

"Monsieur Guillaume!"

"Wait!" said the old Forester, unmoved.

"Well?"

"You see that door, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, the sooner you are on the other side of it, the better it will be for you."

"Monsieur Guillaume!"

"Only, when you leave my threshold, say good-bye to it; for you won't cross it again!"

"Sir!"

"Silence! People are coming, there is no need for folks to know that I have received a scoundrel at my table."

And Guillaume, turning his back on the Maire, set to to whistle a little hunting tune with which our readers have already made acquaintance and which he kept for great occasions.

The people before whom Guillaume was anxious not to tell the wood-merchant that he thought him a scoundrel proved to be the Abbé Grégoire and Mère Watrin.

"Here I am, M. le Maire," said the former, looking for the wood-merchant with his short-sighted eyes. "Are you ready?"

"So much ready," said Guillaume, "that M. le Maire, as you see, is waiting for you on the other side of the door."

And he pointed to the wood-merchant who, following his advice, had got out into the open.

The Abbé neither saw nor understood anything of what had taken place, and passing out in his turn without noticing the warmth of the conversation said, "Good evening, Monsieur Guillaume. May the peace of the Lord descend on this house with the blessing that I give you!"

"Your servant, Monsieur l'Abbé; your servant, Monsieur le Maire," said Madame Watrin, following her two guests and making a curtsey at every step. Guillaume's eyes

followed them as long as he could see them, then turning his back on the door with a fling of his shoulders which was habitual with him, he pulled out his pipe, which he filled tightly to the brim, placed it between his two jaws and while he struck the tinder-box, "Good!" he muttered between his teeth, which were so tightly set that his words could scarcely pass between them, "here I am with another enemy; but no matter, there's no alternative, either one is an honest man or one is not. If you are, some one comes and puts you in a fix, and you can only do as I have done. Good, here is the old woman coming in again; attention, Guillaume!"

And pressing down with the flint the ignited tinder on the bowl of his pipe, he proceeded to draw from it clouds of smoke, a symbol of the dull anger which darkened his heart and his brow.

Mère Watrin needed only to cast a glance at her husband to perceive that something exceptional had happened.

She went and came, turned round and passed before and behind him, but could draw nothing from him but a rather thicker cloud of smoke. At last she determined to be the first to break the silence.

"Tell me," she said.

"What?" rejoined Watrin with a brevity of speech that would have done honour to a Pythagorean.

Marianne hesitated for a moment. "What is the matter with you?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"Why don't you speak?"

"Because I have nothing to say."

Mère Watrin moved away from the old Forester and again drew near him several times.

If her husband had nothing to say, evidently she was not in the same frame of mind.

"Hum!" she ejaculated.

Watrin took no notice.

"Guillaume!"

"Yes?" rejoined the latter.

"When is the wedding to be?" asked she.

"What wedding?"

"Why, Catherine and Bernard's, to be sure."

Watrin felt himself relieved of a great burden, but nevertheless did not let it appear at all.

"Oh!" he said, resting his hands on his hips and looking her in the face, "so you have come to your senses again?"

"Tell me now," she went on, not answering his question, "I think the sooner it is the better."

"You don't say so!"

"Suppose we fixed it for next week?"

"And the banns?"

"We could go to Soissons and get a dispensation."

"Good, now you are more in a hurry than I am."

"Why, you see," she said, "it is . . . it is . . ."

"It is? It is? What?"

"It is that I have never passed such a day before."

"Bah!"

"To part from one another, to die each by ourselves!" and her breast heaved distressingly. "And that after twenty-six years of married life!" she added.

And she burst out sobbing.

"Your hand, mother," said Guillaume.

"Oh, here it is," cried she, "and with all my heart."

Guillaume drew the good old woman to him. "And now," he said, "kiss me." Then looking at her, "Why," he added, "you are the best wife on earth!"

But he qualified it in a way which our reader himself will not find too severe, "When you choose, I mean, of course."

"Oh," replied the old lady, "I promise you, Guillaume, that from this day on I shall always choose."

"Amen!" said Guillaume.

At this moment François came in again. Any one who had looked at the worthy fellow more closely than did Père Watrin would have seen that he was not in his habitual state of calm self-possession.

"There!" he ejaculated with the evident intention of making Guillaume notice his presence.

And in fact the latter turned round.

"Well," he asked, "are they packed in and away?"

"Don't you hear them?"

Just at that moment a carriage could be heard rolling along the road.

"That is they going away."

Then, while Guillaume stood listening to the rumbling, which gradually got further and further away, François went and took his gun from the chimney corner. Guillaume saw the action.

"Why," he asked, "where are you going?"

"I am going. Here, I must tell you something; but it is for your own ear alone." Guillaume turned towards his wife.

"Wife!" said he.

"Eh?"

"You might as well clear the table; it will be all the more got over before to-morrow."

"Why, what am I doing then?" asked she, with an empty bottle under her arm and half a dozen plates in each hand, and going off in the direction of the kitchen, the door of which closed on her.

Guillaume kept his eyes on her and when she vanished, asked, "What is it?"

François went close to him and said in a low tone, "It is this; while I was at work putting M. le Maire's horse to, I heard a gunshot."

"In what direction?"

"In the direction of Corcy, as it might be near the Prince's spring."

"And you think it's some poacher, eh?" asked Guillaume.

François shook his head.

"No?"

"No," echoed François.

"Well then, what is it?"

"Father," said he, lowering his voice another tone, "I recognized the report of Bernard's gun."

"Are you sure?" asked Watrin in some alarm, for he could not understand for what reason Bernard could have fired a gun at such a time of night.

"I should know it among fifty," rejoined François. "You know he loads with rounds of felt or cardboard and that makes a different report from wads of paper."

"Bernard's gun," Guillaume asked himself, more and more alarmed. "What can that mean?"

"Ah, yes, what can that mean? That is what I asked myself too."

"Listen!" said Guillaume, starting, "I hear a noise."

François listened. "It is a woman's footstep," he murmured.

"Catherine's, perhaps?"

François nodded a negation.

"It is an old woman's step," he said. "Mademoiselle Catherine walks more lightly than that. That is the step of some one past forty."

At the same moment two sharp knocks on the door reached their ears.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRANÇOIS TO THE RESCUE

THE two men exchanged glances; there was in the air something like a presage of disaster. During this moment of silence and alarm the name of Monsieur Watrin was heard twice, spoken by some one. Mère Watrin came in at this moment.

"What is wrong, and who can be calling the old man?" she asked.

"It is Mother Tellier's voice," said Guillaume.

"Open, wife."

Marianne went quickly to the door, opened it and sure enough Mother Tellier, quite out of breath from the pace at which she had come, appeared on the threshold.

"Good evening, Monsieur Watrin and the company," said she. "A chair if you please, a chair. I have run every bit of the way from the Prince's spring."

The two men at the mention of the fountain exchanged glances again.

"And what procures us the pleasure of seeing you at such an hour, Mother Tellier?" asked Guillaume first, in a changed voice.

But for all answer Mère Tellier put her hand to her throat.

"Water, for the love of God!" she said. "I am choking."

Mère Watrin hastened to fetch the good woman what she asked for. She drank eagerly.

"Mother," she said, "now that I can speak, I will tell you what brought me here."

"Speak, Mother, speak," urged Guillaume and Marianne in one breath, while François stood apart, shaking his head sadly.

"Well," went on Mother Tellier, "I come on behalf of your son."

"On behalf of Bernard?" and "On behalf of my son?" said Guillaume and Marianne together.

"What has happened to the poor young man?" asked the messenger; "he came into my place an hour ago as pale as death."

"Wife!" cried Guillaume, looking at Marianne.

"Hush, hush!" murmured she, understanding what there was of reproach in this one word.

"He drank two or three glasses of wine, one after the other. When I say one after the other, I say wrong, he drank them at one go, for he drank from the bottle."

This detail alone was enough to frighten Guillaume: to drink from the bottle was a thing so unlike Bernard that to do so indicated a considerable derangement in the balance of his mind.

"Bernard drank from the bottle!" repeated Guillaume. "Impossible!"

"And he drank like that without saying a word?" asked Marianne.

"No," replied the good woman, "he spoke to me on the contrary like this: 'Mother Tellier, do me the favour of going as far as the house; you will tell Catherine that I shall write to her soon.'"

"What, he said that?" cried Mother Watrin.

"Write to Catherine! And why write to Catherine?" asked Guillaume, more and more alarmed.

"Oh, the gunshot! the gunshot!" murmured François.

"And he said that and no more?" questioned Marianne.

" Oh yes, wait, do."

Never had narrator a more attentive audience.

Mother Tellier went on, " Then I asked him, ' And your father ? Is there nothing for him ? Is there nothing for your mother ? ' "

" Ah ! you did well ! " cried the pair, breathing like people who are at last going to learn something.

" Then he answered, ' My father and mother, you may tell them that I came by here, and wish them good-bye from me.' "

" Good-bye ? " echoed three voices, simultaneously, but with different intonations. Then Guillaume added alone, " He charged you to bid us good-bye ? "

And turning to his wife with a tone of unutterable reproach, " Oh, wife ! wife ! " he cried, putting his hand over his eyes.

" But that is not all," went on the messenger.

A unanimous movement brought Guillaume, Marianne and François near her.

" What did he say besides ? " asked Guillaume.

" He said, ' Tell them besides to keep Catherine with them, and I shall be grateful to them for all kindness they may show her, if I should happen to die like your poor Antoine.' "

" To die ! " broke in the two old people together, turning pale.

" ' Tell them,' " went on Mère Tellier, ' to make Catherine their heiress.' "

" Wife ! wife ! wife ! " cried Guillaume, throwing about his arms.

" Oh, that wretched gunshot," murmured François.

Marianne had fallen on to a chair and burst into sobs, for she felt, poor mother, that she was the first cause of all that had befallen, and in addition to the alarm her husband felt, she was a prey to remorse as well.

At this moment an anguished cry was heard outside.

" Help ! help ! " cried a muffled voice.

Muffled as was the voice all knew it and all four cried in unison, " Catherine ! "

But of them all, Guillaume was first at the door.

It opened and showed Catherine, pale, with haggard eyes, dishevelled, almost crazy.

"Murdered!" shé cried. "Murdered!"

"Murdered?" cried the witnesses of these two scenes, during which the horror had gone on increasing.

"Murdered! murdered!" repeated Catherine, fainting and quivering in Père Guillaume's arms.

"Murdered! Who is murdered?"

"Monsieur Louis Chollet."

"The Parisian!" cried François, almost as pale now as Catherine.

"What? What are you telling us? Come, speak," urged Guillaume.

"Murdered! Where, dear Mademoiselle Catherine?" asked François.

"At the Prince's spring," she faltered.

Guillaume who was supporting her almost let her fall.

"But who by?" asked Madame Tellier and Madame Watrin in concert. Not having the same reasons as Guillaume and François to fear a terrible disaster, they were still able to ask questions.

"Who by?"

"I don't know," replied Catherine.

The two men breathed more freely.

"But to come to the point," asked Guillaume, "how did it happen? How came you to be there?"

"I thought I was going to meet Bernard at the spring."

"Meet Bernard?"

"Yes, Mathieu had made an appointment with me in is name."

"Oh, if Mathieu has any hand in the matter," muttered François, "we are not out of the bush yet."

"And so," went on Guillaume, "you have been to the Prince's spring?"

"I thought Bernard was waiting for me there; I thought he wanted to say good-bye to me. It was not true, it was not he at all."

"It was not he!" cried Guillaume, clinging to every straw of hope.

"It was another man."

"The Parisian?" cried François.

"Yes. When he caught sight of me he came towards me, for by this splendid moonlight he could see me across the clearing at more than fifty yards. When we were no more than ten yards from each other I recognized him. Then I understood that I had fallen into a trap. I was going to cry out, to call for help when suddenly a flash came from the direction of the great oak which shelters Madame Tellier's wine-shop. A gunshot rang out, Monsieur Chollet uttered a cry, put his hand to his breast and fell. Then, as you can understand, I fled like a mad thing; I ran all the way and here I am: but if the house had only been twenty steps farther off I should have fainted, I should have died by the way."

"A gunshot!" repeated Guillaume.

"It is the one that I heard," murmured François.

Suddenly a terrible idea which seemed to have left her revived in Catherine's mind: she looked about her with growing dread, and seeing that he whom she was looking for was not there, "Where is Bernard?" she cried. "Where is he? In the name of Heaven, where is he? Who has seen him?"

The most mournful silence would have been the only answer to this painful inquiry, had not a yapping voice from the doorway, which had remained half open since Catherine came in, said, "Where is he? poor Monsieur Bernard, where is he? I am going to tell you, I am. He is arrested."

"Arrested!" stammered Guillaume heavily.

"Arrested! Bernard, my child," cried the mother.

"Oh, Bernard! Bernard! That is what I feared," murmured Catherine, letting her head drop on her shoulder as if she was going to faint.

"What a misfortune! oh, God! oh, God!" exclaimed Mère Tellier, clasping her hands.

François alone, his eye fixed on the vagabond as if he meant to read him and all that he would say and still more what he would not say, growled between his teeth, "Mathieu! Mathieu!"

"Arrested!" repeated Guillaume, "how and why?"

"Lord, I cannot tell you over well," replied Mathieu, crossing slowly and painfully the parlour from end to end to go and sit in the chimney corner, his usual place. "It appears some one fired at the Parisian. The gendarmes from Villers-Cotterets, who were coming back from the Corcy fête, saw Bernard making off, so they ran after him, caught him by the collar, pinioned him and took him away."

"But where are they taking him?" asked Guillaume.

"Oh, I know nothing about that, where they take folks that have committed murder. Only I said this to myself: I love Monsieur Bernard, I love Monsieur Guillaume, I love all the Watrin household, which has been kind to me, has fed me and warmed me. I must tell them the mishap that has befallen poor Monsieur Bernard, because anyhow if there is any way of saving him. . . ."

"Oh, God! oh, God!" cried the mother, "and to think that it is I, I with my obstinacy, my miserable obstinacy, who have caused all this."

As for Father Guillaume, he appeared calmer and stronger, but perhaps none the less he was suffering even more than his wife.

"And you say, François," he asked in a low tone, "that you recognized the sound of his gun?"

"Yes, I told you so; I will answer for that, mind you."

"Bernard a murderer!" muttered Guillaume. "Impossible! impossible!"

"Listen," said François, as if struck by a sudden inspiration.

"What?" asked the old Forester.

"I ask you for three-quarters of an hour."

"For what purpose?"

"To ascertain for you whether Bernard is or is not the murderer of M. Louis Chollet."

And without taking either hat or gun François darted out of the house and disappeared at a run in the thick wood.

Guillaume was so much taken up with what François had just said to him and was trying so eagerly to explain his plan to himself that he barely took notice of two things. The first was that his wife had fainted, and the second that the Abbé Grégoire had come in again.

It was Catherine who first noticed the worthy priest, whom his black attire prevented from being seen in the dim light. "Oh," cried she, running to him, "it is you, M. l'Abbé, it is you!"

"Yes," he said, "I thought that there were tears to be wiped away here and I came back."

"Oh, God! oh, God! It is my fault," cried the old woman, slipping from her chair to her knees, "it is my fault, it is my very grievous fault!"

And the poor repentant sinner beat her maternal breast with all the strength of her fists.

"Alas! my dear Guillaume, he said, as he left you, 'Let the evil recoil on you,' and it is on you that it has in fact recoiled!"

"Oh, M. l'Abbé," cried the old man, "are you too going to say like the others that he is guilty?"

"We shall soon know that," said the Abbé.

"Why, yes, we shall know it," rejoined Guillaume. "Bernard is hasty, hot-blooded and quick-tempered, but he is not a liar."

And Father Watrin took his hat.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to the prison."

"It is no good, we came up with him on the high road between his two gendarmes, and M. le Maire gave orders to bring him back here to proceed in your presence to the first examination; he hopes you will have enough influence over Bernard who loves you to make him tell the truth."

At this moment, as if he had only waited for the moment when the Abbé announced his coming, the Maire entered. On catching sight of him Guillaume shuddered instinctively. He felt plainly enough that he was face to face with an enemy.

"Faith, Monsieur Watrin," he said with a malicious smile, "you forbade me to cross the threshold of your door, but you will understand that there *are* circumstances . . ."

Guillaume had seen his smile.

"And you are not sorry for the circumstances, are you, M. le Maire?" said he.

At this moment the trampling of horses was heard at

the door; the noise relieved the Maire of his quandary by making it unnecessary for him to answer.

He turned his back on Guillaume and calling to the gendarmes, who had not as yet put in an appearance, "Bring the prisoner in and keep the door."

Scarcely had this order been given when Bernard, pale and with a brow covered with sweat, but calm and self-possessed, appeared in the doorway, his two thumbs tied together.

On seeing him Madame Watrin came to herself and with a mother's impulse, cried, "My child! my dear child!" and made as if to rush into his arms, while Catherine veiled her face with both hands.

But Guillaume caught her by the wrist. "One moment," said he; "we must first know whether we are talking to our son or a murderer."

And addressing himself to the Maire while the constables took Bernard to the far side of the parlour, he said, "M. le Maire, I ask to look Bernard in the face, to say two words to him, and then it will be I to tell you whether he is guilty or not guilty."

The permission was one which could not easily be refused altogether. The Maire gave vent to a grunt which might be taken as granting it. Then Guillaume, as they say at the theatre, took the stage and while a semicircle was formed, of which Bernard and his captors made the central point, he put out his hand, and in a voice that was not wanting in a certain solemnity, said, "Bear witness all of you that are here to what I am going to ask and what he will answer. In presence of this woman who is your mother and of this other woman who is your betrothed; in presence of this worthy priest who made a Christian of you, Bernard, I, your father, I who bred you to the love of truth, and the hatred of falsehood, Bernard, I ask you here as God will ask you one day, are you guilty or are you innocent?"

And he fixed on the young man a glance which seemed intended to read the very depths of his heart.

"Father," replied the young man in a calm and gentle tone. But Guillaume interrupted. "Take your time,

Bernard, be in no hurry to answer, that your heart may not plunge into the abyss; your eyes on my eyes, Bernard, and do you all look carefully and listen heedfully. Now, answer, Bernard!"

"I am innocent, father," said he in a voice as calm as if it was a matter of the greatest indifference to him.

A cry of joy issued from the mouths of one and all, with the exception of Mathieu, the Maire, and the constables. Guillaume put out his hand and laying it on Bernard's shoulder, said, "To your knees, my son!" Bernard obeyed. Then with an expression of implicit faith impossible to describe, he said, "Bless you, my child; you are innocent, that is all I want to know. As for the proof of your innocence, it will come when God pleases. It is now a matter between men and you. Embrace me, and let justice take its course."

Bernard rose and threw himself into his father's arms. "Now," said the latter, stepping aside so as to let Bernard be seen, "your turn, wife!"

"Oh, my child, my dear child," cried Mère Watrin, "so I am to be allowed to embrace you!" And she threw her arms around his neck.

"My kind, good, dear mother!" exclaimed Bernard.

Catherine was waiting, but when she made as if to come forward to the prisoner, he waved her back.

"Later on," said he, "later on. I too, Catherine, have a question to ask you, on your everlasting salvation."

Catherine drew back with a gentle smile, for she too was by now as sure of Bernard's innocence as of her own. What she thought to herself his mother said out plainly.

"Oh, I too," she cried after embracing him, "will answer for it that he is innocent."

"Good!" said the Maire with a sneer, "you are surely not going to believe that, if he is guilty, he will be quite so simple as to say, 'Well, yes there, it was I that killed Monsieur Chollet?' Not such a fool as all that, surely!"

Bernard fixed on the Maire his clear and almost commanding eye and with great simplicity in his tone, "I will say, not for you, M. le Maire, but for those yonder who love me, I will say, and God who hears me knows whether I lie or speak the truth, yes, my first impulse was to kill Monsieur

Chollet when I saw Catherine appear and when I saw him get up to go and meet her. Yes, I sprang forward with that intention; with that intention I put the butt of my gun to my shoulder. But then God came to my help; He gave me strength to resist the temptation. I threw my gun far from me and fled. It was while I was fleeing that I was arrested. Only I was fleeing not because I had committed a crime, but in order not to commit it."

The Maire made a sign and a gendarme showed him a gun.

"Do you recognize this gun?" he asked Bernard.

"Yes, it is mine," answered the young keeper, simply.

"The right barrel has been discharged, as you see."

"Quite true."

"And it was found at the foot of the oak which rises above the little dell in which lies the Prince's spring."

"That was exactly where I threw it," said Bernard.

At this moment Mathieu rose with an effort, put his hand to his hat, and a voice was heard, the scanty confidence of which was ascribed to modesty, saying, "Pardon me! excuse me, M. le Maire, but I have perhaps a reason to urge that would prove poor Monsieur Bernard innocent. It may be that by looking carefully the wads might be found; Bernard does not load like the other keepers with paper, but with rounds of felt cut out with a stamp."

An applauding murmur greeted this unexpected opening: for a quarter of an hour past Mathieu had been totally forgotten.

"Officers," said the Maire, "one of you will go to the scene of the murder and try to find the wads."

"To-morrow morning at daybreak some one will go there," replied one of the officers.

Bernard cast an open glance at Mathieu and met the dull glance of the latter. He seemed to see the eye of a serpent gleam suddenly in the darkness. He turned away in disgust. Under the ray of flame which the eye of the young man darted, Mathieu would perhaps have remained silent, but Bernard having turned away, as we have said, the scamp plucked up courage and went on:

"And then," he said, "there is another thing which

will be still more conclusive as to the innocence of Monsieur Bernard."

"What is it?" said the Maire.

"I was there this morning," replied Mathieu, "when M. Bernard loaded his gun to go to the boar hunt; well, just to be sure of his own bullets, he had marked them with a cross."

"Oh, indeed," said the Maire; "he had marked them with a cross?"

"That I am sure of," said Mathieu. "It was I that lent him my knife to make the cross, is it not so, M. Bernard?"

Under the benevolent appearance Bernard so instinctively realized the sharp and cruel tooth of the viper that he did not even answer.

The Maire waited a moment and seeing that Bernard remained silent, said, "Prisoner, are these two circumstances correct?"

"Yes, sir," he replied, "it is the truth."

"Faith," resumed Mathieu, "you can well understand, M. le Maire, that if the bullet could be found and it had no cross, I could then quite answer for it that it was not M. Bernard who fired the shot; just as if for instance the bullet bore a cross and the wads were of felt I should then not know what to say."

A constable came near the Maire and putting his hand to his hat, said, "Beg pardon, excuse me, M. le Maire . . ."

"What is it, officer?"

"It is, M. le Maire, that this lad has told the truth." And he pointed to Mathieu.

"How do you know that, officer?" asked the Mayor.

"This way; while the young man was speaking, I drew the charge from the left barrel of the gun. The bullet has a cross, and the wads are of felt. Look!"

The Maire turned towards Mathieu.

"My friend," he said, "all that you have just said with a view to Bernard's benefit, unhappily goes against him, seeing that is *his* gun and the gun has been fired."

"Oh!" resumed Mathieu, "as for the gun having been fired, that proves nothing, M. le Maire. Only if the bullet and the felt wads are found, faith! then it *would* look black, very black indeed!"

The Maire turned to the prisoner.

"So," he asked, "you have nothing else to say in your defence?"

"Nothing," replied Bernard, "except that appearances are against me, but yet I am innocent."

"I had hoped," said the Maire solemnly, "that the sight of your parents, your betrothed and"—here he pointed to the Abbé Grégoire—"of this worthy priest would inspire you to tell the truth, that is why I brought you here. I was mistaken, it has done nothing of the sort."

"I can only say what is the case, M. le Maire, I am guilty of an evil intention, I am not guilty of a bad action."

"It is quite settled?"

"What?" asked Bernard.

"You do not mean to confess."

"I shall not lie to myself, sir, and as little shall I lie against myself."

"Come, constables!" cried the Maire.

The officers made a motion of the head and taking Bernard by the arm, said, "Come, march!"

But hereupon Mère Watrin, recovering from her stupor, darted between the door and her son.

"Why, what are you doing, M. le Maire?" cried she. "You are taking him away?"

"Of course I am taking him away," was the reply.

"But where to?"

"To prison, to be sure!"

"To prison! Why, have you not heard that he is innocent?"

"The truth is," muttered Mathieu, "that as long as they have not found the ball marked with a cross and the felt wads . . ."

"My dear Madame Watrin, my dear young lady," said the Maire, "it is my bounden duty to act as I am doing. I am a magistrate. A crime has been committed. I do not trouble myself as to how. This crime must affect me, whose protégé the victim was, a young man placed with me by his parents, a young man who was dear to me, a young man I was specially charged to watch over. No, Chollet and your son are equally in my impartial eyes

merely two strangers. But justice must take its course. A man's life has been taken. The matter is most serious. Officers, proceed!"

The gendarmes again pushed Bernard towards the door.

"Good-bye, father; good-bye, mother," said the young man.

Bernard, followed by Mathieu's burning glance which seemed literally to push him towards the door, took two or three steps in that direction.

But this time it was Catherine who blocked his way.

"And I, Bernard, is there nothing for me?" she asked.

"Catherine," said the young man in a choking voice, "when I die and die innocent, perhaps I shall forgive you. But at the present moment I have not the strength to."

"Oh, the ingratitude of it!" cried Catherine, turning away. "I believe him innocent and he believes me guilty."

"Bernard! Bernard!" said Mère Watrin, "before leaving her, for mercy's sake, my child, tell your poor mother that you are not angry with her."

"Mother," said Bernard with a resignation full of sadness and dignity, "if I am to die I shall die as a grateful and dutiful son, thanking the Lord for having given me such good and tender parents."

Then he too turned to the constables, saying, "Come, gentlemen, I am ready."

And amid stifled cries, tears and sobs he waved a last good-bye and moved towards the door. But on the threshold he found François panting, the sweat pouring from his brow, without a tie and with his coat on his arm, barring his passage.

CHAPTER XIX

MATHIEU BROUGHT TO BAY

AT the sight of the young man, signing imperatively to everybody to move not a step farther, every one felt that François was the bearer of some important news. So except Bernard everybody went back a step. Mathieu

could not fall back, the wall of the chimney preventing him, but though he appeared to find some difficulty in keeping his feet, yet he did not sit down.

"Phew!" cried François, throwing his coat or rather letting it fall against the wall and leaning against the door-post like a man on the point of falling.

"Well," asked the Maire, "what is it now? Shall we not get done to-day? Officers, to Villers-Cotterets!"

But the Abbé Grégoire knew that it was help that was coming.

"M. le Maire," said he, coming a step forward, "this young man has something important to tell us, listen to him. Is it not so, François, you have something new and important to say?"

"Oh, never mind me," said the latter to Mère Tellier and Catherine, who were bustling round him, while the Abbé, Madame Watrin and Guillaume watched him as shipwrecked mariners on a raft in mid-ocean and tempest watch on the horizon the ship which is to rescue them.

Then, addressing the Maire and the constables, "Here now, where are you going, you?" he asked.

"François, François!" cried Mother Watrin, "they are taking away my child, my son, my poor Bernard, to prison."

"Oh," said François, "that's right, he is not in prison yet and it is a league and a half from here to Villers-Cotterets, to say nothing of the fact that old Père Sylvestre is a-bed and that he would not care to get up at such an hour as this."

"Ah!" cried Guillaume, breathing freely, for he felt that as soon as François adopted that tone he was no longer alarmed, and he filled his pipe, which he had forgotten for more than half-an-hour.

As for Mathieu, he performed a manœuvre which no one noticed, slipping from the chimney to the window, on the sill of which he seated himself.

"Oh," said the Maire, "so we are M. François' servants here. Start officers, start!"

"Excuse me, M. le Maire," put in François, "but I have something to say against that."

"Against what?"

"Against the order you have just given."

"And is what you have to say worth listening to?" asked the Maire.

"Faith that is just what you must judge for yourself. Only I warn you it will take rather a long time."

"Oh, if what you are going to say is so long, that's right. It will keep till to-morrow."

"Oh, no, M. le Maire," said François, "for it to be right it should be this evening."

"My friend," rejoined the Maire in a tone of patronizing importance, "since only positive information can be admitted in criminal matters, you will not object if I move on. Officers, take the prisoner away."

"Well then," said François, becoming serious again, "you will hear me, M. le Maire, for the information I bring is positive."

"M. le Maire!" cried the Abbé Grégoire, "in the name of religion and humanity I conjure you to hear this young man."

"And I, Monsieur," said Guillaume, "in the name of justice I bid you pause."

The Maire stopped almost in alarm in face of the imperious authority of this fatherly love. But not wishing to appear to yield he said, "Gentlemen, as soon as there is a man dead, there is a murderer."

"Excuse me, M. le Maire," broke in François, "there is a murderer, it is true, but no dead man."

"No one dead?" echoed all present.

"What is he saying?" cried Mathieu.

"The Lord be praised," ejaculated the priest.

"Well now," went on François, "if I had only that to tell you, it seems to me it is a fine piece of news of itself."

"Explain yourself, young man," exclaimed the Maire pompously, delighted to have this good news as a pretext for the delay accorded to Bernard.

"M. Chollet was knocked down by the force of the discharge, he fell fainting from the shock, but the bullets flattened against a purse full of gold which he had in his coat pocket, and it glanced along his ribs."

"Oh dear!" cried the Maire, "what are you saying, my friend? The bullet flattened against the purse?"

"That was money well placed, eh, M. le Maire," said François.

"No matter! Dead or alive," rejoined he. "There has been an attempt at murder."

"Oh," replied François, "who says otherwise?"

"Let us come to the point," declared the magistrate.

"Faith!" cried François, "I ask no better. But you interrupt me every moment."

"Come, speak, speak, François," cried all present.

Two only of them remained silent, but with very different expectations, Bernard and Mathieu.

"Well," said François, "listen, M. le Maire, this is how the thing happened."

"But," questioned the magistrate, "how can you know how things happened when you were with us in this room at table when it took place nearly half a league from here, and you never left us?"

"Well, no, I did not leave you, but what of that? Now when I say there is a wild boar in such and such a covert; it is a male or a female; it is a thirdling, a youngster or a 'rogue.' Have I seen the animal, eh? Not I; but I have seen its trail, and that's all I require!"

François had not even looked in Mathieu's direction, but the latter none the less felt a shudder pass all over his body.

"I resume then," went on François. "This is how things happened. M. Bernard arrived first at Mère Tellier's *cabaret*. Is that so, Madame Tellier?"

"Quite true," said the good woman.

"What then?"

"He was very excited?"

"Oh," said she, "that is true too."

"Silence!" cried the Maire.

"He walked about like this," went on François, taking long strides, "and two or three times out of impatience stamped his foot near the table which is opposite the door?"

"Calling for wine, that's true again," cried Mère Tellier,

raising her hands to heaven by way of expressing her admiration for François' almost miraculous perspicacity.

Mathieu wiped with his sleeve the sweat that came out on his forehead.

"Oh," said François, answering the good woman's exclamation, "that is not very difficult to see; there are prints of shoes in the sand, three or four nails deeper than the others."

"How could you see that by night?"

"Why, how about the moon? Do you think that shines up there merely for dogs to bay at? Then M. Chollet came on horseback from the direction of Villers-Cotterets. He dismounted thirty paces from Mère Tellier's *cabaret*, tied his beast to a tree, and then passed in front of M. Bernard. I even fancy that he lost and searched for something like money, for there was tallow on the ground, which proves that some one had looked on the ground with a candle. During this time M. Bernard was hidden behind the beech which is opposite the house, and he went on raging savagely. The proof is that there were two or three places where the moss had been torn away from the tree trunks at the level of a man's hand. After finding what he was looking for, the Parisian struck off in the direction of the Prince's spring, then sat down four steps from the fountain, then he got up again. Then he went twenty steps or so towards the Soissons Road. Then he received the discharge and fell."

"Oh, that is just it, that is just it!" cried Catherine.

"To-morrow," said the Maire, "we shall know who fired the shot; the wad will be found and the bullet looked for."

"Oh, there is no need to wait till to-morrow for that, I have brought them, I have."

A gleam of joy illumined the livid brow of Mathieu.

"What?" said the Maire, "you have brought them? You have got the wads and the bullet?"

"Yes. The wads, you understand, were in the direction of the discharge, and it was quite easy to find them, but the bullet there was more trouble about, that devil of a purse and also maybe to some extent the ribs had made it

go astray; but no matter, I found it in a beech-tree. Look, here it is."

And François presented to the Maire in the hollow of his hand the two wads and the flattened bullet.

The Maire made one of the constables show him a light.

"You see, gentlemen," he said, "that the wads are of felt, and as for the ball, although flattened and knocked out of shape, it still bears the mark of a cross."

"Egad!" said François, "that is indeed surprising, seeing they are Bernard's wads and the cross was made by him on the bullet this morning."

"What is that, what is he saying?" cried Père Watrin, hastily gripping his pipe, which was on the point of slipping from his trembling jaws.

"Oh, he is ruining him, the wretch!" cried Catherine.

"Ah, that is what I was afraid of," stammered Mathieu, with a pretence of pity. "Poor M. Bernard!"

"Then you admit that the shot was fired from Bernard's gun?"

"Certainly I acknowledge it," said François. "It is M. Bernard's gun, it is his bullet, and they are his wads: but all that does not prove that he fired the shot."

"Oh!" said Mathieu, "does he suspect anything?"

"Only, as I told you, M. Bernard was storming a great deal; he stamped his foot, he tore the moss. Then when M. Chollet went away he followed him to the foot of the oak, there he took aim, then all of a sudden he changed his mind, he went several steps backwards, then he threw his gun on the ground. The hammer, which was cocked, and the muzzle have left their mark in the road. Then he fled!"

"Oh, dear Lord!" cried Mère Watrin, "this is a miracle, a miracle!"

"What did I tell you, M. le Maire?"

"Hush! Bernard," put in Père Guillaume, "and let François speak. Do you not see that he is on the scent, the keen sleuth-hound?"

"Oh, oh!" muttered Mathieu, "this begins to grow alarming."

"Then," went on François, "another man came."

"What other?" asked the Maire.

"Oh, that I do not know," said Francois, winking his eye at Bernard, "another, that is all I could see."

"Good! I breathe more freely now," said Mathieu.

"He picked up the gun, he put one knee to the ground, which shows he is not a good shot like Bernard, and fired. It is then, as I told you, that M. Chollet fell."

"But what object could the new-comer have in killing M. Chollet?"

"Ah, that I don't know. Perhaps in order to rob him."

"How did he know that he had money?"

"Have I not told you that I thought the Parisian had let his purse fall in the arbour where Madame Tellier puts her wine to cool? Well, I should not be astonished if the murderer was hidden in the arbour at that moment. I saw the marks of a man lying flat on his stomach, and who had scooped out the sand with his hands."

"But has M. Chollet been robbed?" asked Guillaume.

"I should think so, two hundred louis were taken from him; nothing but that."

"Oh, forgive me, my poor Bernard!" said Père Guillaume, "I did not know the Parisian had been robbed when I asked you whether you were his murderer."

"Thank you, dear father," replied Bernard.

"But now, who is the thief?" asked the Maire.

"Why, I tell you I do not know him. Only in running from the spot to where M. Chollet fell, he tripped in a rabbit burrow and twisted his left foot."

"Oh, the fiend!" muttered Mathieu, who felt his hair rise on his head.

"Oh, come, come! that's a bit too strong," cried the Maire. "How can you know that he twisted his foot?"

"Ah, that is not so difficult! For thirty paces the two feet left even traces. All the rest of the way only one of them bears all the weight of the body. That one is the right; the other, which scarcely shows, is the left. Therefore he sprained his left foot, and when he weighs on it, 'gad, that hurts him!"

"Ah!" muttered Mathieu.

"That is why he did not make off," went on François.

"No, if he had fled, he would have been five or six leagues from here, all the more that with such feet as he has he must be a good walker. No, he went and buried his two hundred louis twenty paces from the road and a hundred paces from here between two big bushes at the foot of a birch. It is easily recognized, for it is the only one of its kind—the birch, of course, I mean."

Here, Mathieu, wiping his brow for the second time, put one of his legs the other side of the window.

"And from there," asked the Maire, "where did he go?"

"Oh, from there he went along the high road, and the high road is paved, as you know. I can tell you nothing of his movements there."

"And the silver?"

"Excuse me, it is gold, M. le Maire, all in twenty and forty-franc pieces."

"Well, this gold, did you take it and bring it as a material proof?"

"Bah!" said François, "I took good care not to. Stolen gold, that burns."

And he shook his fingers as if he had in fact burned himself.

"Well, come to the point."

"And then," went on François, "I said to myself, 'Better make a descent on the scene with the Law, and as the thief does not expect I know his hiding-place, the swag will surely be found.'"

"You are wrong," said Mathieu, getting through the window, and casting a glance of hatred at Bernard and François, "the swag will not be found." And he made off without a soul except François noticing his departure.

"Is that all, my friend?" asked the Maire.

"Faith yes, or very nearly, M. Raisin," was the answer.

"So far, so good. The law will value your deposition. In the meanwhile understand clearly that as you give no names and all this rests upon conjecture, the accusation continues to lie on Bernard."

"Oh, as to that I have nothing to say," rejoined François.

"In consequence to my great regret, M. Guillaume

with great reluctance, Madame Watrin, I must have Bernard go with the constables and proceed to prison."

"Well, be it so, M. le Maire. Wife, give me two shirts and what I want besides to stay in prison with Bernard."

"And I, too! And I, too!" cried the mother. "I will go with my son wherever he goes."

"Do as you please, but get under way."

And the Maire motioned to the officers who forced Bernard to go a pace toward the door. But François did what he had done before and putting himself in the prisoner's way said, "One moment more, M. le Maire."

"If you have nothing to add to what you have said . . ." replied the Maire.

"Oh, nothing, nothing of course! See now, suppose . . ." He seemed to be trying to think of something.

"Supposing what?" asked the Maire.

"Supposing, a mere supposition, supposing that I know the guilty man."

All gave vent to a cry.

"Suppose, for instance," went on François, lowering his voice, "that he was here just now."

"Why then," cried the Maire, "the proof would escape us and we should relapse into doubt again."

"Yes, that is true. But one last supposition, M. le Maire. Let us suppose that I have placed Bobineau in ambush in the shrubs to the right and Lajeunesse in those to the left, and that at the moment the thief puts his hand on his treasure, they will lay hands on the thief, eh?"

At this moment a noise was heard on the high road like that made by a man who does not want to move and is being forced to move in spite of himself.

"Ah! there now," said François with a burst of laughter which crowned his period, "they have got him, he does not want to come back and they are obliged to shove him."

At the same time Lajeunesse and Bobineau, holding Mathieu by the collar, appeared in the doorway.

"Saints in Paradise!" swore Bobineau, "will you use your legs, vagabond!"

"Come, you rascal, no sulking or skulking here!" cried Lajeunesse.

"Mathieu!" exclaimed all in the room with one voice.

"Look, M. le Maire," said Lajeunesse, "here is the purse."

"And here is the thief," added Bobineau. "Let us come and have a little talk with M. le Maire, my jewel."

And he shoved forward Mathieu, who, obeying the propulsion in spite of himself, went limpingly a few steps on.

"There," cried François, "did not I tell you that he was lame on the left leg? Will you accept my prophecies another time, M. le Maire?"

Mathieu saw that there was no denying it; he was caught and there was nothing left for him but to show a bold front to fortune.

"Well, yes," he said. "What then? It was I that fired the shot, I don't deny it. I only wanted to make M. Bernard and Mademoiselle Catherine fall out, because M. Bernard clouted my head. When I saw the gold, that turned my brain. M. Bernard had thrown down his gun; the Devil tempted me, I picked it up and there you are. But not a shred of premeditation, and as the Parisian is not dead, I shall get off with ten years at the galleys."

All breasts expanded, all arms were stretched out towards Bernard, but the first to fall on the young man's bosom was Catherine. He made a vain movement to press her to his own, his hands were tied.

The Abbé Grégoire saw the sorrowful smile that passed over the young man's lips.

"M. le Maire," he said, "I hope you are going to order Bernard to be set free at once."

"Officers, this young man is free," said the Maire. "Unbind his hands."

The officers obeyed.

Thereupon there was a moment of confusion in which father, mother, child and betrothed formed a group without form as without name from which came cries of happiness, sobs of joy.

Everybody wept, even the Maire wiped away a tear.

But Mathieu made a discordant element in the picture.

"Take this man away to the prison at Villers-Cotterets," said he to the constables, indicating Mathieu, "and lock him up securely."

"Oh, ho! Père Sylvestre," said Mathieu, "won't he be disgusted just at being woke up at such a time of night!"

And freeing his hands from those of the constables who wanted to put the handcuffs on him, for the last time he gave out the call of an owl.

After which he yielded his hands, let himself be pinioned and went out between the constables.

CHAPTER XX

CONCLUSION

So Mathieu was taken to the gaol at Villers-Cotterets and locked up under the charge of Père Sylvestre in the stead of Bernard Watrin.

Once the real culprit was arrested and dragged off by the constables along the high road, once the Maire had left the house, his head bowed and throwing behind him a glance of penitence and regret, once the worthy inmates of the *Maison Meuve* were left to themselves and rid of strangers (for Mère Tellier, the worthy housewife, the good Abbé Grégoire, Lajeunesse and Bobineau, those two clever players who had contributed so much to the successful winding up of the drama, and friend François, who had followed up the trail with a sagacity that would have done credit to the Last of the Mohicans, none of these could be called strangers), nothing any longer interfered with the frantic explosion of joy that burst out in the family circle.

First there was a warm handshake exchanged between father and son. The son's clasp said, "You see I did not deceive you, father," while the father's replied, "Did I ever seriously suspect you, Bernard?"

Then came a long embrace of son and mother, an embrace

in which the mother muttered low, "And to think it was all my fault!"

"Hush! Let's say no more about it," replied Bernard.

"That it was I who by my obstinacy was the cause of all the trouble!"

"Please, please don't say that."

"Will you forgive me, my poor, dear child?"

"Oh, mother! dear, kind mother!"

"In any case I have been well punished, there!"

"And you will be well rewarded, I hope."

Next Bernard went and took the Abbé Grégoire by both hands, and looking the excellent priest in the face said, "And you did not doubt me either, did you, M. l'Abbé?"

"Did I not know you better than your father and mother did?"

"Yes, better, M. l'Abbé," said the mother.

"Oh, indeed better!" echoed the father.

"Oh, as for that," cried the old woman, ready to start an argument, "I should much like to know who can know a child better than his own mother."

"He who made the soul after the mother had made the body," said Watrin. "Do I make any protest? Do as I do, old woman, and hold your tongue."

"Not I, indeed; I shall never hold my tongue when I am told there is some one knows my son better than I do."

"Yes, mother, yes, you will," said Bernard. "And for that I shall need only to say one word to a woman as religious as you are." Then he added with a laugh, "Do you forget that the Abbé is my confessor?"

Then came Catherine's turn: Bernard had kept her to the last. Selfish fellow!

It was that he might keep her the longer.

So when he came to her, "Catherine!" he cried in a stifled voice, "dear Catherine!"

"Bernard! my kind Bernard!" murmured she with her eyes and her voice full of tears.

"Oh, come, come!" said he, drawing her away through the still open door.

"Why, where are they going?" cried Mère Watrin with

a movement so swift and impetuous that it savoured of jealousy.

The father shrugged his shoulders.

"To their own business, I suppose," said he, cramming his pipe. "Let them go, do, wife."

"But . . ."

"Look here, at their age and under the circumstances should we not have had something to say to each other?"

"Hum!" said the mother, throwing a last look towards the door.

But even if the door had been open she would have seen nothing; the two young people had already reached the trees and were lost under the thickest shade.

As for Bobineau, Lajeunesse, François and Père Watrin, they had proceeded to examine by the light of the candles the bottles that remained on the table and ascertain conscientiously what remained in their insides.

The Abbé Grégoire took advantage of this occupation in which the four cronies were absorbed silently to take his hat and stick, slip noiselessly through the doorway and as noiselessly resume his way to Villers-Cotterets, where he found his sister, Mademoiselle Adelaïde Grégoire, waiting for him in the greatest anxiety.

The two women, Mère Watrin and Mère Tellier, crouched in the great chimney and proceeded to wind off a skein of words which was not less long or less entangled for being run off in a low tone.

At the first rays of dawn Bernard and Catherine reappeared at the door like two birds of passage who go away together and come back together. Catherine with a smile on her lips and keeping her eyes on her lover as much as possible, went and embraced the mother and father and prepared to go up to her room. But scarcely had she gone the first step on the way from the table where the four men were seated to the staircase door when Bernard stopped her as if she were forgetting something.

"Well?" he said in a tone of gentle reproach. Catherine had no need to ask for an explanation; Bernard was understood by this kindred spirit. She went to François and offered her two cheeks to him.

"What?" asked François, quite astonished at such a generous guerdon.

"She is kissing you for thanks to be sure!" said Bernard. "I think we owe you that at least."

"Oh," cried François, "oh, Mademoiselle Catherine!" and he wiped his mouth with his napkin and put a great smacking kiss on each of the girl's blushing cheeks.

Then Catherine, giving Bernard her hand for the last time, went up to her room.

"Come, come, my children," said the latter, "I think it is time we went on our rounds. Being happy is not everything, the Duke of Orleans' work must be done."

And with a look that cannot be described he picked up his gun, which the constable had brought back, with one barrel discharged.

"Just to think . . ." he muttered.

"However——"

Then clapping his hat on his head, "Let us be off," he said, "let us be off."

As he went out he raised his head. Catherine was at her window, smiling at this rising sun which was going to shine on one of her good days. She saw Bernard, picked a carnation, kissed the flower and threw it to him.

Bernard did not let the blossom fall to the ground. He caught it on the wing, took the kiss which was hidden between its perfumed leaves and put it in his breast.

Then followed by his three comrades he plunged into the forest.

The day recalled Mère Tellier to her canteen. She bade farewell to her friends the Watrins and took her way towards the *cabaret* at the Prince's spring at the same hasty pace at which she had come. She carried away with her a budget of news which would furnish food for conversation all through the day.

Bernard innocent, Mathieu guilty, Catherine's and Bernard's wedding fixed to take place in a fortnight's time. It was long since such a subject for chatter had been granted to the village gossips.

Then there was a contest of self-sacrifice between Father and Mother Watrin, each of them wanting to send the other

to bed and insisting on going without sleep so as to guard the house. As thanks to the old woman's obstinacy this bout of abnegation threatened to degenerate into a quarrel, Père Watrin took his hat, plunged his hands into his pockets, and went off for a walk down the Villers-Cotterets road. On reaching the Stag's Leap he saw M. Raisin coming back in his little chaise with his old servant, Pierre.

At sight of the Maire Watrin was making for the forest, but he had been recognized.

M. Raisin stopped the chaise, jumped down and ran towards the good man, crying, "Hi, M. Watrin! dear M. Watrin!" Watrin stopped. What made him avoid the Maire was that feeling of shame which every decent man has at the bottom of his conscience, which extends from him to others and which makes him blush for others when the latter do things which are not exactly honourable.

Now it will be remembered that the proposals that the wood-merchant had made the night before to Père Watrin were not exactly honourable. As he stopped Watrin asked himself what the Maire could want of him.

He waited with his back turned and only when the Maire was close to him did he wheel round.

"Well," he asked sharply of M. Raisin, "what is it now?"

"It is, M. Watrin," said the Maire, feeling embarrassed enough and speaking with his hat off to the old keeper while the latter listened with his hat on his head, "it is that since I left you this morning I have thought a great deal."

"Oh, really," said Père Watrin, "and what about?"

"Everything, dear M. Watrin, and more particularly this, that it is neither well nor good to wish to get hold of your neighbour's goods, even if that neighbour is a Prince."

"In what connection do you say that to me, sir, and what goods have I ever wished to purloin?" asked the old man.

"My dear M. Watrin, in what I have just said," went on the Maire with a certain humility, "believe me that you are not in question at all."

"And who is in question then?"

"Why, only myself, M. Watrin, and the crooked proposals

I made to you last night about any balks or joists of timber that might happen to be near the limits of my purchase."

"Well, and that is what brings you back?"

"Why not, since I have realized that I was wrong and that I owed apologies to a worthy and honourable man whom I had insulted?"

"Me? You did not insult me, M. le Maire."

"But I did. One insults an upright man when one makes him proposals that he cannot accept without giving the lie to his whole life."

"Well, it was not worth while to put yourself out for so little, M. Raisin."

"So you call it 'so little' to blush before one's fellows and not to venture to give them one's hand when one meets them! I call that a great deal, sir, I do. So I beg you to forgive me, M. Watrin."

"Me!" asked the old Forester.

"Yes, you."

"I am not the Abbé Grégoire to absolve you," said the old man, half touched, half laughing.

"No, but you are M. Watrin and all upright men are one family. I passed out of it for a moment; give me your hand, M. Watrin, to enter it again."

The Maire uttered these words in a tone that spoke of such sincerity that it made the tears come into the old man's eyes. He took off his hat with his left hand as he would have done in the presence of his inspector, M. Deviolaine, and held out his hand to the Maire.

The latter took it and squeezing it fit to break it, if the old Forester's hand had not itself been of a very solid order, 'Now, M. Watrin," he said to him, "That is not all."

"What! that is not all?" asked the Forester.

"No."

"What is there besides, Monsieur Raisin?"

"Well, I have acted wrongly this past night towards others as well as you."

"Oh, yes, you are speaking of your accusation against Bernard. You see, M. le Maire, it does not do to be in a hurry to accuse people."

"I see, sir, that my anger against you made me unjust

and made me all but commit an act which I shall feel remorse for all my life if Monsieur Bernard does not forgive me."

"Oh, never mind about that. Rest assured, M. le Maire, Bernard is so happy that he has already forgotten everything."

"Yes, dear M. Watrin, but at certain moments he may remember and at those moments shake his head and say between his teeth, 'No matter, M. le Maire is a bad man all the same.'"

"Ah!" said Père Watrin, laughing, "I will not answer for it that in a moment of ill-humour the matter will not come back to his thoughts."

"There is a way, not to prevent the matter coming back to his thoughts, for no one can control his memory, but that when it does so come back he may drive it away."

"What is it?"

"It is for him to forgive me heartily and sincerely as you have just done."

"Oh, as for that, I answer for him as I would for myself. Bernard, look you, has no more gall than a chicken. So look upon the matter as settled; and if necessary, not to disturb you, and since after all he is the younger man, he will come and see you."

"I certainly hope he will come to my house, and stay there sometimes, and you also, Madame Watrin, Catherine and François, and all the keepers in your district."

"Very well. And when shall it be?"

"Coming out from the wedding mass."

"And what for?"

"Why! for the wedding feast."

"Oh, M. Raisin, no, thank you."

"Do not say no, M. Watrin, it is settled that way. Unless, faith, you are quite determined to bear me malice, you and your son. I have taken it into my head that it is to be I who will give the wedding dinner, and why not? I had scarcely gone to bed on my return from your house last night when that began running in my head to such an extent as to keep me from my sleep. I have made out the menu."

"But M. Raisin. . . ."

"First, there will be a ham of the boar that you killed yesterday, or rather that François killed. Then doubtless the Inspector will give us leave to knock over a buck. I will go myself to the La Ramée ponds to choose the fish. Mère Watrin will make the game stew, seeing that she makes it, begad, as nobody else can. Then we have a nice brand of champagne which comes straight from Épernay, and an old Burgundy which only asks to be drunk."

"All the same, M. Raisin . . ."

"No 'ifs,' no 'buts,' no 'all the sames,' Père Guillaume, or really I shall say, 'Come, Raisin, it seems you are really a bad man, since here you are at enmity to the death with the most upright folks upon earth.'"

"M. le Maire, I cannot answer for anything."

"Oh, if you can answer for nothing, then it will go ill with the women, for it is the women, look you, Madame Raisin and Mademoiselle Euphrosine, who stuffed a lot of foolish and jealous ideas into my head. Oh, how right M. l'Abbé is in saying that in all times woman has been the ruin of man!"

Old Watrin would perhaps have gone on resisting, when he felt himself being pulled by the coat tails. He turned round. It was old Pierre.

"Ah! M. Watrin," said the good man, "do not refuse M. le Maire what he asks you, in the name . . . in the name . . ."

And old Pierre cast about in the name of what he could best appeal to the compassion of Père Guillaume.

"Ah!" said he, "in the name of the two five-franc pieces you gave the Abbé Grégoire for me when you heard that M. le Maire had discharged me and taken on Mathieu."

"Another foolish idea those confounded women stuffed into my head. Ah, the women, the women! There is none but your wife that is a saint, M. Watrin."

"What, the mother!" cried Watrin. "Oh! oh! it is easy to see . . ."

Père Watrin was going to say, "It is easy to see you do not know her," but he checked himself in time and

finished his sentence with a laugh thus, "It is easy to see that you know her."

Then looking at the Maire, who was waiting for his decisive answer with anxiety, "Come," said he, "that is agreed. We shall dine with you on the wedding-day."

"And the wedding will take place a week earlier than you think," cried M. Raisin.

"How so?" asked the old Forester.

"Guess where I am going."

"When?"

"This moment."

"Where you are going?"

"Yes. Well, I am going to Soissons to buy the special licence of my Lord Bishop."

And the Maire mounted into the chaise with old Pierre.

"Well," said Père Watrin, laughing, "then I will answer to you for Bernard. You might have done ten times worse to him and he would forgive you all the same."

M. Raisin whipped up his chaise, which old Guillaume followed with his eyes so intently that he let his pipe go out.

Then, when the chaise had disappeared, "My faith," said he, "I did not think he was such a decent man as that," and striking the tinder, "He is right," he went on, "it is the women. Oh, the women, the women!" murmured Père Watrin between the puffs of smoke from his pipe.

Then suddenly shaking his head he turned slowly and pensively towards the *Maison Neuve*.

A fortnight later, thanks to the licence bought by M. Raisin of my Lord Bishop of Soissons, the organ sounded gaily in the little church of Villers-Cotterets while Bernard and Catherine, kneeling before the Abbé Grégoire, smiled at the practical jokes of François and other wags, who insisted upon throwing a perfect shower of old shoes at the heads of the young couple.

Madame Raisin and her daughter, Mademoiselle Euphrosine, kneeling on superior chairs covered in velvet and marked with their monogram, took part in the ceremony, a little apart from the other guests. Mademoiselle Euphrosine watched out of the corner of her eye the good-looking

Parisian still pale from his wound, but already sufficiently recovered to be present at the wedding.

But it was clear that M. Chollet was much more concerned with the fair bride, all blushing under her wreath of orange-blossom, than with Mademoiselle Euphrosine.

The Inspector and all his family were present at the ceremony with his thirty or forty Foresters about him as a guard of honour. The Abbé Grégoire delivered an address, which did not last more than ten minutes, but which made all present dissolve in tears.

As they were leaving the church, a stone thrown with great force fell in the midst of the wedding party, but luckily without hurting anybody. It came from the direction of the prison which is only separated from the church by a narrow lane.

Mathieu was discovered behind the bars of a window. It was he who had just thrown the stone. Seeing that he was being looked at, he put his hands together and imitated the cry of the owl.

"Hullo, M. Bernard," he cried, "you know the owl's cry brings ill-luck."

"Yes," replied François, "but when the prophet is bad, the prophecy is falsified."

And the party moved away, leaving the prisoner to gnash his teeth.

Next day Mathieu was transferred from the prison of Villers-Cotterets to that of Lâon, where the assizes of the Department are held. As he had foreseen, he was sentenced to ten years at the galleys.

Eighteen months later the papers under the head of *miscellaneous intelligence* contained the following piece of news.

"We read in the 'Semaphore of Marseilles' that an attempt at escape has just been made at the hulks at Toulon, which turned out very ill for the poor wretch who tried to get away.

"A convict, after having obtained a file, no one knows how, had succeeded in sawing through the ring of his chain and hiding himself under a heap of wood in the yard where the galley-slaves work.

" When the evening came he made for the beach, crawling and escaping the eyes of the sentry. But at the noise he made in jumping into the water the sentry turned round and made ready to fire at the fugitive when he should come to the surface again to take breath. After some seconds he reappeared and the soldier's shot followed immediately on his appearance. The fugitive dived, and this time not to reappear.

" The report of the weapon at once brought a party of soldiers and officials of the hulks on the scene of the occurrence. Two or three boats put out, but they searched in vain whether for the fugitive or his corpse.

" It was not till the next day, towards ten in the morning, that a lifeless body floated up to the surface of the water ; it was that of the convict who had tried to escape the night before.

" This poor wretch, sentenced to ten years' hard labour for attempted murder with premeditation, but accompanied by extenuating circumstances, was registered at the hulks by the single name of MATHIEU ! "

THE "JUNO"

CHAPTER I

1795

WHEN Lord Byron, yet a boy, left Scotland for England, and Aberdeen for Newstead Abbey, he was sent to a boarding-school at Nottingham, kept by a worthy man named Drury. With his tutor he became a great favourite, so much so, that while his schoolfellows were being drilled, or taking other exercise for which his lame foot incapacitated him, the boy was frequently allowed the run of his master's library.

This library, rich in classics and suchlike literature, had a section allotted to voyages and travels, which offered the greatest attractions to the future poet.

One day his entire attention was absorbed by an account of the shipwreck of the English vessel *Juno*, and in the graphic account given by John Mackay, second mate. The passage narrating the death of a youth, one of the crew, and the grief of the lad's father, had such an effect upon him, that, says his biographer Thomas Moore, who quotes the passage twenty years later, its substance may be found repeated in the poet's masterpiece, *Don Juan*."

The impression thus produced on Byron's mind, instanced by Thomas Moore, has affected us in a similar manner, and made us frequently desire to read John Mackay's complete account of the disaster.

Having at length succeeded in finding it, we have recast it in the following pages, wherein the passage imitated by the author of *Don Juan* will be easily recognized. The story is as follows:

At the southern extremity of the Burmese Empire, in the delta of the Irrawadi, which forms a splendid port, stands the city of Rangoon, one of the most important commercial centres of Pegu, whose exports at that time principally consisted of timber.

In this port, at the beginning of May, 1795, was lying a British vessel of four hundred and fifty tons, named the *Juno*, Captain Alexander Bremner, laden with teak for Madras.

When she was on the point of sailing, her second mate fell sick, and it speedily became evident that he could not bear the voyage, and assist in performing the sometimes arduous duty of navigating the Bay of Bengal in the height of the south-west monsoon. It was therefore most important to replace him by a capable man, whom Captain Bremner was not long in finding.

A man in the full vigour of life, between thirty-five and thirty-eight years of age, a thorough seaman, and a sailor from boyhood, presented himself with excellent discharges, certifying him to be fully acquainted with the latitudes in which the ship was voyaging. His name was John Mackay.

Captain Bremner questioned him, overhauled his papers, and clearly perceiving that he would be a profitable exchange for the sick officer, made an engagement with him for a year.

As the state of the ship on which he entrusts himself and his life is of paramount importance to the sailor, John Mackay had hardly stepped on board before he began to examine the vessel from topmast to keel, an overhaul which resulted anything but favourably for the *Juno*.

She was old, in bad order, and badly found. The crew, fifty-five all told, all Lascars, except eight or ten Europeans, did not inspire the experienced John Mackay with a confidence sufficient to counterbalance the bad impression produced by the old-fashioned build, the bad condition, and the slovenly stowing of the ship's cargo. He therefore considered it his duty to speak frankly to the Captain, and tell him what an unfavourable opinion he had formed of the seaworthiness of the ship after his survey.

But Captain Bremner was a sailor of the happy-go-lucky class, grey in the service, who argue that because they never have been shipwrecked they never will be.

He bluntly told his second mate that he had sailed the *Juno* for twenty years, that she had never come to grief so far, and that, seeing she had kept a level keel for twenty years, the presumption was that she would hold her own for twenty-one, or till the expiration of their agreement.

John Mackay replied that his remarks were not made from a selfish point of view, but in the interest of all; that so far as he was concerned, thank God! he was so accustomed to the sea that he was ready, if need be, to cross the Bay of Bengal in a skiff, but that, inasmuch as every officer on board a ship is more or less responsible for her safety, he thought it due to himself to make the remarks which he had made.

The Captain ironically thanked his second mate, and pointing to his wife, who was just then coming on board, and who was to sail with him, he asked him if he did not think that he had weighty reasons for desiring a prosperous voyage.

A rapid glance at Mrs. Bremner, a bride of six months, was an unanswerable argument in favour of the Captain. She was, indeed, a charming creature.

A European born in India, she possessed, in addition to her great personal beauty, all that bewitching tropical grace peculiar to creoles, who incorporate in their style and actions a reflection of that luxuriant nature in the midst of which they have opened their eyes, in which they have been reared, and in which they will die.

A female Malay slave, dressed in the picturesque costume of the country, accompanied her, forming an accessory which completed the grouping of this picture, in which Mrs. Bremner formed the principal figure.

John Mackay saw at once that he, who risked his own safety only, had nothing to gain in argument with his Captain, who entrusted the life of his charming wife to the ship which he commanded. He therefore let the matter drop; the stowing of the timber was completed, and, on the 29th of May, 1795, the barque dropped down at flood-

tide, in soundings of twenty-five to thirty feet of water over a bottom of soft mud.

From the moment of weighing, the second mate thought that the ship was being steered out of the proper channel; but Captain Bremner was too experienced a navigator in these latitudes to allow any question that he was wrong in his bearings. Mackay could not, however, help observing to Wade, the first mate, that in his opinion the course was too much to starboard. The chief mate thought so himself, and ordered the lead to be heaved, with the result that less than twenty feet were sounded.

Matters were looking serious; the Captain was at once informed, but he would not believe the state of affairs till convinced by his own eyes, when he ordered the ship to be put about. Before, however, the helmsman could luff, a violent shock showed that the vessel had grounded.

There was not a moment to lose; the Captain instantly gave the order to jibe, in order to get the ship off, but it was a useless command; nothing was to be done but try to prevent her from drifting further on the sandbank. Two bower-anchors were immediately dropped, and, to everybody's delight, they held, and the ship remained stationary, which gave time to decide upon what to do.

The *Juno* had grounded on a sandbank almost as hard as rock, but nevertheless she withstood the shock, and sprung no leak. No real damage had been sustained up to this point, when one of the two anchors began to drag, and made the other drag also. On this the sheet-anchor was at once dropped. The ship, already beginning to swing, drew the chain taut, tightened it like a bow-string, but this stopped her from drifting further.

Captain Bremner was beginning mentally to acknowledge the justice of his second mate's remarks; but instead of being grateful to him for foreseeing danger, he felt vexed with him for having predicted it. Such is human nature!

But, as we have said, no actual damage had taken place, and if the ship could only be prevented from capsizing at low tide, they were pretty sure to get her off at the flood; and as no serious damage had been sustained, she might,

when floated, pursue her course, taking no heed of this misadventure.

The first thing to do was to reduce the top-heaviness of the vessel; to this end the topgallant mast and yards were lowered. At low tide the ship, as had been foreseen, heeled in an alarming manner. It was a terrible moment, but it passed off without accident.

The Captain, with a swaggering air, accosted John Mackay.

"Well, mate," said he, "for an old boat, I think the *Juno* has not done so badly."

John Mackay shook his head. The *Juno*, no doubt, had behaved well, but all depended on the continuance of her good behaviour.

The Captain appeared to be justified by subsequent events; at flood-tide the ship floated; the moment this was perceived orders were given to weigh anchor. Every stitch of canvas was set, and she soon found herself in water deep enough to remove all fear on the score of grounding again.

On the 1st of June the wind changed and blew a gale from the south-west; a heavy sea arose, and the ship laboured a good deal. The second mate had stationed a man at the bottom of the hold; after about four hours' duty he appeared on deck, reporting that the vessel had sprung a leak, thus confirming the apprehensions which the second mate had always entertained.

The Captain himself went down into the hold, where the water was actually beginning to rise; unfortunately they had no carpenter on board, and hardly any tools.

The ship's company set to work to pump out the ship. To do this all, without distinction, worked at the pumps; but, as if all things conspired to wreck the unfortunate *Juno*, her ballast was sand, and this sand, mixing with the water, quickly choked the pumps. After eight hours' pumping, during which the ship laboured heavily, instead of the pumps gaining on the water, the water gained on the pumps.

Then it was deliberated whether it would not be best to put about for Rangoon; but as so doing would have

been an admission on the Captain's part that the second mate was right, and as a Captain cannot be wrong, Captain Bremner pointed out that the coast near Rangoon was so low that it could not be sighted further than three or four leagues off; that even if they hit off the right course, and found the ship manageable, they would have to keep in a kind of canal not thirty feet wide, fenced in on both sides by sandbanks on which they had already grounded, and that if they struck again the leak would inevitably be further widened. It was therefore, in his opinion, better policy to keep their course, risking whatever might happen; he further argued that the coarse weather had now lasted seven days, and probably would give place to smoother seas, and that under improved conditions it would be easier to master the leak.

The Captain was master. His opinion on the course to be taken was equivalent to an order; they therefore held their course for Madras, so far as the boisterous weather would let them.

At the outset things seemed to prove the Captain in the right.

On the 6th of June the wind dropped, the sea grew calm, and, as Captain Bremner had foretold, the leak diminished so much that one pump sufficed to keep it under. Search was then made, and the leak was located at the stern-post on the water-line, a spot easy to get at and repair.

As soon as ever the weather permitted they slung the cutter over the ship's side, and, as has been said, having no carpenter, and hardly any tools, they were obliged to plug up the hole with oakum, nailing a piece of tarred canvas over it, and covering the whole with sheet lead.

This simple expedient was at first quite successful, and, in fine weather, they needed only to pump once during each watch, which naturally made them suppose that the leak was got under. Mutual congratulations ensued, every one went gaily about his work, except John Mackay, who, in the midst of these rejoicings, shook his head now and then, muttering a proverb common to the English and the French languages, thus expressed in the latter—*Qui vivra verra.*

CHAPTER II

THE MIZZEN-TOP

ALAS! before long it was but too evident that after all the second mate was right, and that the *Juno* would have done better to return to Rangoon, whatever dangers she might have risked encountering on the coast of Pegu, rather than hold her course across the Bay of Bengal, to encounter the hurricanes coincident with the south-west monsoon.

On the 12th of June, in the midst of a gale, accompanied by the mournful groans of the timbers of the ship, which was labouring heavily, a second time resounded the cry which had before turned all faces pale: "Captain, a leak!"

An investigation between decks showed that the old fissure had opened again. The slight repairs, which held in calm weather, did not suffice against heavy seas. To add to the seriousness of the situation, the influx of water was much greater than before, bringing up more sand and speedily fouling the pumps, although these were kept working simultaneously, and a wooden bucket was also employed for baling. On the 16th the crew, who had been working without intermission for four days, were almost exhausted by fatigue and loss of rest; matters began to look very alarming indeed.

It was unfortunately now too late to put about; they were at least as far from Rangoon as from Madras, they therefore determined to risk everything, to spread all their canvas, from mainsail to studding-sail, and endeavour to make the nearest point on the coast of Coromandel.

Once off the coast, they would either proceed along it and skirt it, or beach the *Juno* and land, according as she was seaworthy enough to continue the voyage or no.

Thus, carrying all sail, the ship made even more way than they even hoped for, but the faster she sailed the more she laboured, and as every one was at the pumps, nobody had any time to devote to working her. At the end of

two days the wind had blown away all her sails, except the foresail; they were obliged, therefore, to lay to from the 18th till noon on the 19th, when they took the sun's altitude, finding themselves in 17° 10″ N. lat.

Notwithstanding their almost superhuman exertions, it was obvious that the water gained upon them, and that the vessel was gradually getting deeper. At the same time, in proportion to her sinking, she became so water-logged that it seemed impossible for her ever to recover her former buoyancy.

From this moment a gloomy sadness took possession of all; they felt themselves lost men, and perceiving all their efforts vain, it became difficult to keep the crew at their posts. However, about noon, on the orders of the Captain and the entreaties of his wife, work was resumed; an order was given, and obeyed, to trim the foresail, and they scudded before a following wind under bare poles.

At the same time their efforts to pump out the *Juno* redoubled; pumps and buckets were kept going; but at the end of two hours it became evident that the ship was doomed, and that all their labour merely protracted her death agony. About seven o'clock in the evening the hands who were below came rushing up in a fright, stating that the water had reached the main deck.

Now that John Mackay's estimate of the ship was justified by the event, so also was his opinion of the crew.

The Lascars, who comprised three-fourths of the ship's company, were the first to refuse to work, and gave themselves up to despair, dragging down into the same despondency some Malay sailors who had shipped with them. As for the Europeans, they continued to show a bold front; but their gloomy countenances belied their brave words, and it was plain that they were merely sustained by moral courage, and were under no illusions as to the fate which awaited them.

Whether supported by ignorance of danger or real courage, Mrs. Bremner, that delicate creature, apparently no more able to withstand the force of a breath of wind than a bending reed, consoled and encouraged everybody. Amongst these despairing men she seemed an angel, invul-

nerable to material dangers, who had strayed out of her proper surroundings, who, when the time arrived for her to leave her present company, would expand her wings, till then invisible, and remount to heaven.

About eight in the evening the vessel shivered two or three times, and sounds were heard as of groans. This was caused by the ship sinking deeper and deeper. Ships, like men, suffer their mortal agonies; they moan, and stiffen in the throes of death.

Then the crew, apprehensive that the *Juno* was going to founder, loudly demanded that the boats should be lowered; but a mere glance at the two available craft was sufficient to satisfy any one that they were useless under the circumstances; they consisted of the ship's cutter, so old as to be unseaworthy, and a six-oared pinnace. The crew, after inspecting them, unanimously declined to attempt to make use of them.

About nine o'clock, the Captain called the two mates into consultation, and it was decided to cut away the mainmast to ease the ship; by this means they hoped to keep her afloat about four-and-twenty hours longer.

The work was set about at once, the sailors, as usua on such occasions, falling to their task of destruction with a will. In the twinkling of an eye the mainmast, cut away at its base, snapped under the blows it received, toppled over and fell, but, unfortunately, instead of going overboard, it fell upon the deck.

The confusion which this caused may easily be imagined. The men at the rudder, unable to steer the ship, let her go broadside on to the waves; she shipped a huge sea, and was completely swamped. Instead of retarding the catastrophe, they had but hastened it.

Then the cry, "We are foundering! We are going down!" resounded on all sides.

Mrs. Bremner, who reckoned on keeping afloat for several hours yet, and whom, perhaps, her husband had kept in ignorance of the imminence of the danger, had retired to her cabin.

The Captain, feeling the ship slipping away from under his feet, gave a shout of warning, and tried to reach the

cabin hatchway; but he got entangled in the loose cordage, and had only time to cry out to John Mackay, who was near him:

"John! John! My wife!"

The second mate rushed to the hatchway, where he found Wade, the first mate, stretching out his hands to reach Mrs. Bremner, who, on hearing the noise made by the falling mast, had sprung out of her berth.

Both mates helped the poor woman to escape; but, much to their surprise, amidst all this frightful confusion, she remained quite collected. Not having time to dress herself fully, she slipped a short skirt over her nightdress, and dropped into the pocket thirty rupees, about one hundred and eighty francs, which she noticed lying on the cabin table.

Trivial though this incident may appear, in the height of the terrible catastrophe which was passing, it will be seen that these thirty rupees were destined to play an important part in the sequel to this awful drama.

The moment the crew perceived that the vessel was sinking, every one instinctively clung to what he found nearest to hand, endeavouring to raise himself as high as possible and get clear of the rapidly rising water.

Wade and John Mackay, who were on the companion of the Captain's cabin, seized the poop-rails, and, with Mrs. Bremner, succeeded in catching hold of the mizzen shrouds.

At the moment of their clinging to them, a noise like a clap of thunder was heard, followed by a terrible shaking; this was caused by the air pent up in the hull of the ship, which burst open the deck. When this shock occurred every one thought all was over, and recommended his soul to God.

But scarcely was the deck submerged before the downward movement of the vessel was arrested, not ceasing altogether, for it was easy to feel that with every sea she sank a little, but so slowly that the lowest rungs of the shrouds disappeared very gradually, which enabled the poor fellows in the rigging to go aloft as fast as the vessel sank. The Captain, who had rejoined his wife, and the two mates, who were supporting her, foresaw that they could not thus remain all night clinging to the rigging, and that they must

find a more solid footing; the mizzen-top was only about ten feet above them; they reached it the first of all, and took possession of it. This was fortunate for them, for if they had not been the first-comers, and the top had been occupied, in all probability at such a moment the respect due to their rank would not have been shown, and they might have been obliged to remain hanging to the shrouds, or to content themselves with outside places.

The example set was instantly followed, and the mizzen-top filled. The remainder of the crew hung on to the rigging of the same mast, with the exception of one sailor, who established himself on the foretop.

They then awaited with anxiety to see whether the fate of the *Juno* was to be their own.

The ship continued to sink slowly, for ten feet more or thereabouts; it then seemed to the wrecked sailors that she remained at the depth she had reached, rolling between two currents. The fore and mizzen-tops were about a dozen feet above the sea, all the crew, with the single exception mentioned, being clustered on and about the latter, which, it became evident, was inadequate to carry the great weight it bore, and threatened to break down at any moment. It was imperative to lighten it, but as this could not be done by sacrificing men, it was decided to cut away some of the rigging, and by means of sheath-knives the spanker gaff was detached and thrown into the sea.

Although the water-logged hull to some extent steadied the standing masts, yet these rolled so terribly that the unfortunate persons who were clinging to them had great difficulty in keeping their positions; notwithstanding this, so fatigued were they, that some who had tied themselves to the rigging with handkerchiefs, and some even who hooked their arms into the rungs of the shrouds, succeeded in sleeping during a portion of the night.

John Mackay, the second mate, was not among these. He had more strength, both physical and moral, than the sailors, and kept his eyes open to what was going on around him. Near him was Mrs. Bremner, in her husband's arms. The night air was bitterly cold, although it was the month of July. More warmly clad than the Captain, the good John

took off his jacket and gave it to Mrs. Bremner, who thanked him, giving him a look as much as to say:

"Ah! if they had only taken your advice."

John would willingly have spoken some words of encouragement as well as given his jacket, but having lost all hope himself, he could not conscientiously inspire in the breast of another the courage which had deserted his own.

Still, when after three or four hours of suspense and anguish he found the ship still floating between the two currents and sinking no deeper, he began to hope that during the four or five days for which human life can be sustained without food, some vessel might pass and pick them up; yet, to set against this hope, the horrible alternative of slowly perishing by hunger appeared more imminent and probable.

His tensely strung nerves received a sudden shock by what sounded like the firing of a cannon; three times did this noise occur; and his own sensation was confirmed by those of such as were near him, and not sleeping, whose attention he drew to the circumstance. Yet, when day broke, they were forced to admit that it was only imagination.

Worn out with fatigue, John Mackay was about himself to close his eyes in sleep when, in the early dawn, a sailor, thinking he sighted a vessel, cried out:

"A sail! a sail!"

The effect this cry produced may be imagined. The Lascars, who are Mussulmans, called upon the Prophet, and the Christians gave thanks to God.

But, alas! the sail proved as imaginary as the cannon; and when all eyes were directed to the point indicated, this was found to be as deserted as the rest of the ocean.

CHAPTER III

THE RAFT

WITH the loss of this double hope the situation was terrible.

The wind continued to blow with violence, the sea ran

mountains high; the upper deck and portions of the ship came away, and at length the stays supporting the mast to which seventy-two persons were clinging seemed about to give way and hurl them into the trough of the sea.

At intervals during this period of despair, some, losing all hope of rescue, and preferring an immediate death to a long agony, after having said farewell to their comrades, dropped into the sea and were seen no more; others, who desired to remain where they were, lost their hold, and, despite their frantic efforts to regain their footing, were torn away by the waves, uttering piteous and despairing cries. It then appeared that the ship, submerged though she was, was not stationary, but continued to make way, for the swimmers were unable to overtake her, and one after the other were engulfed and disappeared. Sad though this sight was, it yet afforded a ray of hope to the survivors.

During the first three days, while the storm lasted, and the sea ran high, the sight of the yawning gulf, and the loss of those who from time to time were swallowed up in it, deadened the pangs of hunger; but as the wind abated, and the sea grew calm, when the apprehensions of sinking and the fear of the mast breaking were removed, then the hideous prospect of perishing by famine presented itself with all its terrors.

At this moment several men, inconveniently cramped in the mizzen-top and cramping others as well, tried to reach the foretop in response to the call of the solitary sailor there, whose sufferings were rendered more acute by his loneliness; but of the six who plunged into the sea two only accomplished the distance, short though it was; the four others were drowned.

As John Mackay was not only the one person who kept his presence of mind throughout this great disaster, but also the one to whom we are indebted for a written account of it, he is naturally the person whom we shall more particularly keep in sight during the pains and anguish, hopes and fears, which he has transmitted to us with the bluff plainness of a sailor.

To the mental agitation, due firstly to the imminence of destruction, and afterwards to the continuance of danger,

there succeeded in his mind, towards the fourth day, a kind of sullen indifference, his chief desire being to sleep as long and as soundly as possible, so as to stifle the pangs of hunger. Consequently the piteous cries of the Lascars and the lamentations of the others annoyed him, because they drew him out of an apathetic frame of mind, hardly conscious, but yet painless.

For the first three days, suspended, like his companions, between life and death, he had not suffered much from hunger, but only from cold, wet through as he was with spray, and chilled by the wind; but on the fourth day, when the wind had gone down, the sky was clear, and a burning sun filled the sky and beat upon his forehead as it were equatorial torrents of lava, then he began to feel in their full force the pangs of hunger, and even more those of thirst. Still, comparing what he himself experienced with what he had read of in accounts of shipwrecks, he did not at first find these so intolerable as he had anticipated.

In one of these narratives he remembered reading a recipe by which the agonies of thirst might be much mitigated. This was given by Captain Inglefield, of the *Centaur*, and consisted in wrapping round the body a sheet soaked in sea-water; the water, freed from the salt, which is left on the skin, is absorbed by the pores, and greatly reduces the pain of the sufferer.

No sooner had this remedy occurred to him than he determined to put Captain Inglefield's recipe in practice, both on his own person and on those of his companions; to which end he stripped off the flannel waistcoat which he was wearing, and by means of a rope-yarn dipped it in the sea and put it on again, repeating the process as often as it became dry. The others followed his example, and the action of the water on the skin, assisted, probably, by the distraction which this employment caused, afforded them considerable relief.

However, during this day, when the sun had regained its power, and the pangs of hunger and thirst became more lively, John became extremely agitated; a kind of delirium presented death before him under a frightful aspect, and the very thought of dying amidst the horrors which were

staring him in the face terrified him to such a degree that he could scarcely refrain from shouting cries of despair.

Happily, during the night which intervened between the fourth and fifth days he was visited by a most soothing dream.

As almost invariably happens when the end of life is reached, and memory leaps with a single bound over all the intermediate space which separates the cradle from the grave, all his youth passed in review before him, with the procession of ancestors long since dead, neighbours forgotten and young friends lost or gone astray in this vast desert called the world, in which it so rarely happens that, once lost sight of, they are ever found again.

Then all these first visions disappeared to give place to another dearer than all.

Poor John dreamt that he was lying sick of a burning fever, during the height of which his father, bathed in tears, was praying at his bedside.

Now, as this dream, so far as John was concerned, had all the actuality of a real circumstance, he experienced great joy at the presence of his father, whom he had not seen since he last left Europe, four or five years before. As the dream progressed, it seemed to him that while the aged father prayed for his son, the fever left him, and he felt revived and sweetly refreshed; but on the contrary, if the old man ceased praying for an instant, the fever recurred more violently than ever.

In the sequel, contrary to what generally happens after agitating dreams which irritate the mind rather than soothe it, when John awoke he felt infinitely better; his agitation had given place to a deep melancholy, and involuntary tears suffused his eyes, for the inference which he drew from the dream was that his father was dead, and that, witnessing from heaven his sufferings, he had come down for a brief space to alleviate them.

On the 25th of June, the fifth day after the submersion of the vessel, death began to ravage the unhappy sufferers. Two died from hunger, one succumbing instantaneously as if from a stroke of fatal cerebral apoplexy; the other slowly and in frightful agony.

After the shipwrecked party had recovered presence of mind enough to exchange ideas, the Captain and the first mate agreed that as soon as the sea was calm enough they must endeavour to construct a raft. This afforded the only hope of rescue, and Bremner and Wade reposed great confidence in it. The weather being fine, and the sea as smooth as a looking-glass, this great project was at once set about.

For materials they had the foresail yard, the bowsprit, and a number of small spars which were entangled in the wreckage. The best swimmers set to work ; neither timbers nor cordage were wanting ; the day after, about noon, the raft was finished. The next question was who should embark on it.

The Captain, his wife, and Wade were the first. Although John Mackay was not so sanguine as they were about this means of salvage, their example decided him ; he came down in turn and took his place beside them. But as every one else did the same, the raft was in an instant so overloaded that it threatened to founder.

Then a terrible struggle arose, such a struggle as occurs among persons dying with hunger. The stronger drove off the weaker, who were obliged to ascend the shrouds for the shelter of the top which they had just left. Some were so weak that they were drowned during this episode, which happened before the raft was cast off, and was only distant from the wreck the length of the rope by which it was attached. Before letting go the painter, John asked Captain Bremner if he had any idea where the land lay, and if he thought there was a reasonable chance of soon making it. The Captain, who was totally ignorant where he was, made no reply. Then John, stretching out his hand to the man who was waiting to cut the rope, stopped him, and, turning to the Captain, implored him, in his own name and the name of his wife, to reascend into the top, and not to risk himself on this raft, which, in his opinion, offered no chance of safety. These prayers, however, had no influence with the Captain ; and as Mrs. Bremner declared that she would not leave her husband, the rope was cut and the raft drifted away. John submitted and

went with them. They rowed with pieces of wood torn out of the planking, which the sailors had cut with their knives into the shape of paddles.

But, after about half an hour, Wade came to John with a sigh.

"What is the matter?" asked John. Wade shook his head.

"You were right," said he; "right when we started; right now. We have neither compass nor chart; we are quite ignorant of the direction of the land, and are going to certain death. From the elevation of our mizzen-top we had at any rate a look-out; we could see a vessel and be sighted by her; but on this raft, lost in the waves, we have not even this chance."

"Then," said John, "let us return to the ship."

Wade glanced in the direction of the two floating mast-heads, peopled with clusters of wretches suspended over the deep sea, and, judging the distance—

"We shall never have strength enough to swim back," said he.

"No; but to lighten the raft they will take us back."

Then he told his companions that he and the chief mate wished to return to the tops, and, as they expected, every one helped them to do so. They pulled back to the wreckage, on to which they climbed; a few seconds after they got back to their former post, and the raft again left.

It might be supposed that this separation between unfortunates who have suffered together for six days, and are parting to undergo different vicissitudes, would be a cruel one. Not so; the selfishness of pain and the fear of death had displaced every other sentiment. The men on the raft saw the two mates go aloft to the mizzen-top without manifesting any emotion, and the men in the top saw the raft float away with indifference.

The only person who showed any feeling was poor Mrs. Bremner, who had undergone all her sufferings with marvellous courage, and who, instead of the lamentations and complaints which the strongest men were uttering, had up till then spoken nothing but words of consolation.

Her presence had at first seemed a burden to her husband.

No doubt this feeling proceeded from a notion on his part that his wife would hardly forgive him, especially after the warning of John Mackay, for having brought her into such danger; but the more the Captain's strength diminished the more was he drawn to his wife, becoming as it were riveted to her, neither leaving her nor allowing her to leave him.

They kept the raft long in sight, but at length it vanished. Night found them still straining their eyes on the point where it was lost to view, and again imprisoned them in darkness. Next morning, at daybreak, they thought they saw a floating object in the wake of the *Juno*. All eyes were directed towards it, and the sailors in the tops and the rigging discovered, to their great surprise, the raft which had left them the night before; but it was returning from the opposite direction to that in which it started.

The men had rowed till they were quite exhausted; it must be borne in mind that they had eaten nothing for a week; they then fell asleep, leaning on one another, awaiting the Lord's pleasure in the apathy of despair. It pleased God that they should rejoin their unhappy companions.

After drifting about all night at random, they again found themselves, by one of those singular chances which seem the will of Providence, within fifty yards of the waterlogged vessel.

They stretched out their arms to their shipmates, who helped them to get back, and the raft incident ceased to have any other consequence in their eyes than a futile attempt inspired by despair.

CHAPTER IV

THE PANGS OF DEATH

THROUGH a feeling of pity which yet smouldered at the bottom of these suffering hearts, but which, it should be stated, powerfully influenced the good John, the two places in the mizzen-top, which Mrs. Bremner

and her husband had previously occupied, were restored to them. The Captain was so enfeebled that he seemed almost unconscious, yet in his ordinary condition he was a seaman inured to all the privations and hardships incidental to his profession, and appertaining to the element which he had ploughed for thirty years. His wife, on the contrary, apparently a delicate and nervous creature, had borne all these fatigues and privations with marvellous courage, and, more extraordinary still, with marvellous strength.

Scarcely had they got him into the mizzen-top when Captain Bremner became delirious, and in his delirium imagining that he saw before him a table spread with all kinds of food, he would ask, struggling in the hands of those who held him, why, when he was so hungry and thirsty and such abundance was before him, he was refused a piece of bread and a glass of water.

The sight of a death-bed is always a moving one; but, generally speaking, death-beds affect us with one kind of emotion only: the grief of separation. Those who stand round the dying person shed tears all the more copiously because they run no danger themselves.

But it is different in the case of an unfortunate wretch expiring from hunger and thirst in the midst of other wretches on the point of death from hunger and thirst like him. In this case every one sees his own fate foreshadowed in that of the dying man. The bystanders already feel, in anticipation, the pangs of death themselves. This delirium, in two hours, in the evening, or next morning, will be their delirium; this death, sooner or later, will be their death.

Here are no tears which console by their very abundance; dry eyes, a gloomy and reserved despair, teeth which gnash when the first symptoms are felt of the pains which are racking the sufferer; howls instead of lamentations; curses instead of words of consolation.

At length the Captain expired.

This was on the 1st of July, eleven days after the catastrophe.

In the convulsions of his death agony he clasped his wife

so closely that they could neither unlock his arms nor unclasp his hands. She, for her part, could not believe him to be dead. Feeling herself pressed against her husband's heart, she struggled not to be deprived of this last embrace, and she was only persuaded of the fact after infinite trouble. She then sadly dropped her arms, and, strange to say, her tears ceased to flow. The men divided among them the few clothes which the Captain possessed, and cast his corpse into the sea.

When she heard the splash made by the falling body, Mrs. Bremner uttered a faint shriek, threw up her arms, and fainted. John Mackay rushed to her aid, and revived her; then she opened her eyes, and recovered the faculty of weeping, which she appeared to have lost.

During the five days which had elapsed between the return of the raft and the death of the Captain, no other accident had happened other than a succession of deaths.

One man was seized with cramps in the stomach, and died in convulsions; sometimes the dying man lost hold of the rigging to which he was clinging and fell into the sea; sometimes he expired grasping it so tightly that it required all the remaining strength of three or four men to make him let go; one died so tightly riveted to the mizzen-stays that his corpse was left hanging to them for two whole days, until, putrefaction setting in, they disarticulated his arms at the wrists, leaving the hands clutching the stay, while the body was swallowed up by the waves.

On the morning of the 28th, two days before the Captain's death, Mr. Wade, chief mate, declared that he could bear this inaction no longer.

The raft, fastened to a cable, was floating below the mizzen-top; he asked if any men would embark with him, and try a different chance from their shipmates. Two European sailors, two Malays, and four Lascars, eight men in all, volunteered, and in spite of all John Mackay's efforts to dissuade them, embarked afresh. As before, the rope was cut, and the raft drifted away. It became lost to sight as on the previous occasion, but next morning it was not visible in the wake of the vessel; a squall had

arisen in the course of the night, and, in all probability, the raft and its occupants had been swallowed up by the sea.

This squall, fatal to the men who left, had a fortunate result for those who remained. Heavy rain fell; the men were able to soak their clothes with it and quench their thirst, thus alleviating their chief source of suffering.

After this, forty-eight hours seldom passed without some fresh squall bringing more rain, which, in addition to wearing a shirt which had been dipped in the sea by means of a rope-yarn, was a great relief. Indeed, whenever these poor fellows, exhausted though they were, could swallow some gulps of fresh water, for some hours the gnawing pains of hunger subsided.

On the day of Captain Bremner's death, besides him died two men in the foretop, and two in the mizzen-top. The men posted in these two places had no communication with one another; they saw what was going on, but had neither anything to say, nor strength to say it if they had.

John experienced every morning great surprise at finding himself alive, and had a firm conviction that each day would be his last, and that he should be a corpse before night. He had heard it stated that a man cannot live more than a certain number of days without food—six, eight, or ten at the most—and here on the eleventh day, that is to say, on the day of the death of Captain Bremner, he was living still.

In the evening the sea was calmer than it ever had been before. Several Lascars, who encumbered the mizzen-top, crowding their comrades, and being hustled by them, swam off to reach the foretop, which had never been full, and in which the death of two men, whom they had seen thrown into the sea, had made still more space. So weak were they that they reached it with the greatest difficulty, and, assisted by their comrades, climbed aloft.

After the 1st and 2nd of July, the survivors were so enfeebled that they became not only unconscious of what was going on around them, but even of their own sufferings. The debility into which even the strongest eventually fell had almost destroyed the sensation of hunger. When

a little rain fell, these dying men seemed to awake from a lethargy; they moved about in an unusual and awkward manner in their efforts to collect all the water they could. Having swallowed this, and exchanged some words of satisfaction, slowly, sadly, and mournfully they gradually returned to their former state of silence and torpor.

The acute suffering of these emaciated and enfeebled bodies arose no longer from hunger and thirst, but from cold. Although in the latitude of the equator, the nights were intensely chilly. Then were heard complaints, groans, chattering teeth. At dawn, the rising of the sun was preceded by a rise in temperature; then the stiff limbs drawn up under the body were stretched out and recovered their suppleness.

Then came fresh torture; the sun, rising to the zenith, beat fiercely on these unprotected heads, a prey to sunstroke; then the misery of the night was forgotten for that of the day; and the absent breeze was invoked, as by night was the absent sun.

In the midst of all this tragic drama many singular isolated incidents occurred almost unnoticed even by those under whose eyes they passed, and whose death agonies rendered them indifferent to the dying struggles of others.

As we have already said, although all were dying from the same causes, all did not die in the same manner; for instance, the son of Mr. Wade, a robust and well proportioned youth, died almost suddenly, without a groan; whilst on the other hand, a youth of the same age, of feminine delicacy and physique, lasted during twelve days of hunger and thirst, and finally succumbed on the thirteenth.

This lad's father was on board, but the great disaster had separated them, the father being the sailor who had escaped to the foretop, while the son climbed up the mizzen-shrouds.

Each remained where he was, conversing in words during the first few days; then, when their voices became too weak to carry the sound, by signs only. But when the youth's signs informed his father that he felt death impending, the unhappy father seemed to recover all his strength.

He lost no time in descending the man-ropes, although for two or three days he had scarcely stirred. Then dragging himself on hands and knees along the weather gunwale, he rejoined his son, took him in his arms, placed him on one of the three or four forecastle planks which had floated aft, and propped him up against the taffrail, lest the waves should wash him away.[1]

When the youth experienced one of those violent spasms in the stomach which we have already mentioned as a mortal symptom, his father again lifted him in his arms, raised him as high as his breast, and wiped the foam from his lips. When a few drops of rain fell, he carefully gathered all he could by means of his handkerchief, which he wrung over the mouth of his child; if the shower increased into a downpour, he opened the lad's mouth, so that he might imbibe the reviving moisture in its first freshness.

Thus he remained, in the same position, for five days. At last, notwithstanding all his care, the youth expired.

Then the poor father lifted him up, grasping him tight to his breast with a power incredible in a man who had had no food for sixteen days. He stared at him with a bewildered expression, still believing that breath would again come from his lips. But the facts were too strong; it was impossible to doubt that his son was really dead.

On realizing this, nothing more seemed to affect him, and he appeared quite indifferent to his own fate. He remained near his son's corpse, stolid and silent, till the sea, increasing under a squall, caught his son's body and swept it overboard.

He watched the corpse float away into the transparent depths of the ocean; then, when he lost sight of it, he wrapped himself up in a piece of canvas, lay down, and never rose again. He must, however, have survived two or three days, so far as can be surmised, for the witnesses of this episode, whose interest and anxiety were aroused by its pathetic circumstances, noticed that his limbs quivered every time a wave broke over his body. The scene alto-

[1] How he could do all this, seeing that the hull of the ship was several feet under water, does not appear. This is the episode introduced into "Don Juan."

gether was so heart-breaking that it deeply moved men whose own situation was so awful that it may well be supposed they had little inclination to observe that of others.

The ship drifted and rolled along at the will of the sea, but under the eye of God, and no one could say whither she was making.

At last, on the evening of the 10th of July, twenty days after the great disaster, one of the shipwrecked sailors, who had long been fixing his gaze on what seemed to him an object in the offing, struggled to an erect position for a better view, and cried out as loud as he could:

"Land! Land!"

CHAPTER V

MRS. BREMNER'S THIRTY RUPEES

THIS herald note of salvation, instead of being received, as might be supposed, with ecstatic joy, was heard without any emotion at all. So deadened were the faculties of the survivors, and so apathetic had they become under these moribund conditions, that God's mercies went for nothing with them, and no one even stirred to verify or disprove the alleged fact of land being in sight.

However, after some minutes, as if a sensible period was required to convey the meaning of this news to the blunted perceptions of those to whom it was sought to be imparted, a slight stir occurred among the wretched survivors. This movement, at first hardly discernible, became contagious, and at length general attention was directed towards the point indicated. But the day was by this time too far spent to decide with certainty whether the object were really land or only one of those mirages which so often mislead shipwrecked crews tossing and drifting on the waste of ocean.

At first little notice was taken of this important intelligence; then, without discussing it, all eyes were strained in the direction shown. Next, night came on, and it was impossible to see anything; and, lastly, strange to say,

every one spoke and behaved as if land were plainly in sight. Conversation, previously dead, revived; every one had something to say, and the universal opinion, with one exception, was that land was in sight.

This exception was John Mackay. He held that it could not be land; and, even supposing it were, he maintained that this by no means proved a rescue.

Poor Mrs. Bremner, shattered by the death of her husband and by her own sufferings, was about to grasp this announcement of land in sight with all the strength of the hope left in her. Her mind was clinging to this idea as her body would have clung to rigging or spars. This obstinate incredulity of John Mackay, his cold reception of the news, supposing it to be genuine, exasperated her.

"Why, tell me," she exclaimed, "why do you dispute the existence of any coast at all, and why, again, if there be a coast, and that coast be lying before us, why are you so indifferent at seeing it?"

"Madam," replied the second mate, "in the first place because I don't believe in the existence of land in this latitude and longitude; and in the second, because if there be land, instead of being our refuge, it will prove our destruction."

"Our destruction! Why?" asked the poor woman, her eyes burning with fear.

"Because," replied John, "it being impossible to steer the ship, she cannot be brought into port, and, such being the case, she will strike on a reef far from the coast, and wherever she strikes she will infallibly go to pieces in a few minutes. If you are weary of suffering, if you feel that you have no strength to support life longer, pray for the sight of land, for land will most certainly terminate all our misfortunes."

This prediction, coming from so experienced a man as John Mackay, caused general consternation, and conversation and hope expired simultaneously. The second mate was himself so sceptical as to the reality of the land said to be in sight, that he tells us he did not even turn his head in the indicated direction the next morning, when he awoke. Just at this moment, however, one of the men

in the foretop shook his handkerchief, and endeavoured to cry "Land!" The others saw the handkerchief, and guessed what he wished to convey, but the weak tones of his voice only reached their ears as in an inarticulate mumble.

At the sight of this handkerchief, at the sound of this feeble and dying voice which nevertheless charmed his ear, the second mate himself felt a vague desire to rise and look round, yet, being in a comfortable position, his arms folded on his stomach, and facing the other direction, he felt a great indisposition to move. It required all the strength of will he possessed to enable him to sacrifice his comfort to his curiosity, and before he had decided to move, a man near had anticipated him and declared that land was actually in sight.

On hearing this a second man rose, then a third, and in five minutes the whole company, including John Mackay himself, were erect and straining their eyes towards the horizon.

He was obliged to admit that the object ahead was singularly like a coast line, but when Mrs. Bremner asked him if he judged it to be the Coromandel coast, the question seemed so absurd to the worthy sailor that, despite the gravity of the situation, he could not help smiling; but as the day went on, the indications of land grew so evident that he became convinced that the jagged horizon could be nothing else but the outline of land.

Only, what land could it possibly be? He had not an idea.

A general feeling of restlessness and anxiety ensued; but, strange to say, amidst this general restlessness, John Mackay experienced a sensation of hope, derived from a dominant religious idea.

There are said to be men who do not believe in a God.

What else have they to believe in, and what other faith is of any avail?

Belief in God includes all other faith.

The religious idea which dominated John Mackay was this. He considered it incredible that a beneficent God

would inspire hope in the breasts of a party of wretches who had suffered frightful tortures, merely as a prelude to terminating their sufferings by death.

Thus, when Mrs. Bremner turned towards him and questioned him with her eyes, as if he were the oracle upon whose reply depended the probabilities of life or death, John Mackay raised his eyes and hands to heaven, murmuring these words:

"Let us hope!"

Thenceforward, all eyes were steadily directed towards the coast.

Unhappily, the more they neared it, and the better its character could be surmised, the more appearance did it present of a sterile desert, and night fell without any more cheering symptoms being descried.

The second mate took up his usual sleeping position, firmly convinced that this night would be his last, and that before morning the ship would have struck and gone to pieces. For all that, he did not sleep less soundly, so exhausted was he.

Shortly before sunrise, the whole company, both the sleeping and the wakeful, were roused by a violent shock —the ship had struck on a rock. A faint cry, hardly louder than a sigh, escaped from all; it died away immediately, and was succeeded by an agonized silence.

The ship struck again and again; so violent were the shocks that the standing masts were shaken, and the tenants of the tops, finding it impossible to stand erect, were obliged to lie flat and grip the cross-trees. By nine or ten o'clock the sea had gone down several feet; the remnant of the deck slowly emerged and remained exposed. A general desire was felt to descend to it; but, enfeebled as they were by twenty days of famine, this was a difficult and dangerous matter. The condition of poor wretches who for three weeks had subsisted solely on a few drops of water caught in stormy weather may be imagined.

Nevertheless, an effort was made, and as man generally succeeds in attaining his ends by the combination of will and skill, so they succeeded in this instance.

The gunner and the second mate further undertook to

lower poor Mrs. Bremner, and, after incredible efforts, got her down as far as the crowfoot, where their strength failed them and they were obliged to leave her. They then applied to such of the Lascars as appeared the least worn out. Two of them volunteered to bring her down on deck, but as they knew that the poor woman was possessed of thirty rupees, they demanded eight, which were promised in her name.

They then climbed aloft to her, lifted her in their arms, and got her down in safety to the deck, which no sooner had they reached than they demanded payment of the eight rupees. Mrs. Bremner was so overjoyed at her rescue from the torture she had endured in the mizzen-top, and felt so hopeful at seeing land before her, notwithstanding the sinister predictions of John Mackay, that she would gladly have given them all the thirty, but the second mate pointed out to her that the twenty-two remaining rupees were all the money they had, and that, should the necessity for spending them arise, it would be more proper to devote them to the general service than to present them to a couple of mercenary wretches who were capable of extorting money from a woman, and that woman the wife of their deceased Captain, as the price of rendering her a slight service.

With regard to the conduct of the ship's company in general, John Mackay states with pride that this conduct of the two Lascars was the only instance of selfishness and greed which could be laid to their charge.

The fatigue of getting down from aloft had been so great that every one lay down to rest, except some Malays and Lascars, who commenced rummaging everywhere to see if they could not find money left lying about. While they were thus engaged, the second mate noticed that the rudder-head had been torn away, and that through the hole caused by this fracture it was easy to get down into the powder magazine.

As soon as the sea had completely left the spar deck, which happened about two in the afternoon, men went below to see if they could not find something useful; but the sea had been beforehand with them and carried away everything, except four cocoa-nuts, which were dis-

covered under the cordage. This gave rise to an incident which partly consoled the more feeling for the inhumanity of the two Lascars.

The finders of the four cocoa-nuts, instead of keeping them for their own use, as they had a right to do, declared them common property to be divided alike, only reserving the milk inside as their share. They were found, however, so old that the milk had become rancid and quite unfit to quench thirst. The solid parts were so dry that they afforded hardly any nutrition, and all who ate any of them soon experienced violent attacks of colic.

Apart from their sufferings through want of water and food, to which these dying persons had become callous, the whole company were faring tolerably well, the conditions of the powder magazine being more comfortable than those of the mizzen-top. There seemed no chance of landing, and even if there had been, surely it was preferable to die peacefully in the magazine, where they were comparatively well off, than be torn to pieces by tigers. Moreover, the stranded wreck might be sighted by a passing ship, their signals be observed, and themselves be rescued. This seemed their sole remaining chance.

As if the mere sight of land had had a beneficial influence, no further deaths occurred. All eyes remained fixed on the blessed land only about three-quarters of a league distant.

About two in the afternoon they sighted what appeared to be a group of men on the shore. This news created a great sensation, and all who were able to move crawled to the taffrail and waved their clothes, making all the noise they could in the vain hope of attracting attention. The party on shore, who might naturally have been expected to observe the stranded vessel, took no notice of her whatever, and dispersed, conduct which made the castaways, foiled in all their attempts to indicate their presence, doubt whether they were really men after all. Still, the sight of this land, and the certainty that it was inhabited by creatures of some kind, inspired them with strength and courage; they spoke of endeavouring to reach it at all hazards, even were they to perish in the attempt. The more vigorous then went below into the magazine, where they had

seen some spars; they took these spars, and with infinite trouble threw half a dozen into the sea. But the floating capacity of these few timbers was insufficient to sustain every one, and a good number were quite unfit to attempt the passage.

Unhappily there was no hope of recovering lost strength; every fresh effort only caused greater weakness; they lay down and waited.

In the evening, when the tide was flowing, six Lascars, the strongest of the survivors, dropped into the sea, clung to the spars, and let the flow carry them towards the beach, on which, notwithstanding a heavy surf, they succeeded in landing in sight of those remaining on the vessel. These latter, from where they were, could see their comrades gain the shore, find a stream of water, and drink of it with unmistakable signs of satisfaction; then, not venturing further inland, and not having strength enough to set about questing for food, they lay down on the beach, too tired to fear the risk of being devoured by beast of prey.

The castaways on board repaired to the taffrail the next morning before daybreak, to view the land by the first rays of sunlight, and learn what had become of the six Lascars, who, they feared, had perished during the night. Happily their apprehensions were groundless; to their great joy they descried the whole party rise from the spot which they had selected for repose the previous evening, return to the brook, and again drink from it.

This sight made the party on board anxious to imitate the example of their comrades, and, at whatever cost, gain the land as they had done. But, in their weak state, they despaired of moving the smallest spar with all their combined efforts. In fact, the only persons left besides the second mate, the boatswain's mate, the gunner, and a young lad, were Mrs. Bremner and another woman, three old men, and a man of fifty years of age, at death's door. Strange as it may seem, these feeble beings, to the great astonishment of the once vigorous John Mackay, himself now reduced to their condition, had survived privations and hardships which had proved fatal to the youngest and strongest.

At mid-day they sighted a large number of men, probably

natives of the country, collected on the beach, and proceeding in the direction where the castaways were reposing. The latter seemed to have no other desire than to stop on the bank of their rivulet.

This sight, as may be imagined, excited the attention of the party on board to the highest pitch. Their own fate depended in great measure upon that of the party on shore, and never had a more crucial moment occurred since the commencement of the drama in which they had taken part.

The two groups halted at some little distance from each other, and appeared to parley in a friendly manner; the smaller then joined the larger, moved with it, and, whilst some were lighting a fire on the shore—doubtless to cook some rice—others began to signal the ship, waving handkerchiefs as if to invite them to land.

This created the most lively emotion among the stranded party. Instead of wild beasts, which might be expected to inhabit this desert shore, they met human beings, who appeared to have relieved those who had effected a landing, and were ready to succour those who might succeed in doing so. Life, which two days previously had appeared onerous and insupportable, now became more precious than ever. The great obstacle was that the natives had no canoes, and, even if they had, it was doubtful whether these could live in the surf; yet a fluttering hope whispered to the castaways that means would be found to put off to them and rescue them.

One consequence of this revival of hope in the breast of John Mackay was that, feeling invigorated by the scene before him, he determined, in his turn, to be one of the actors in it.

He imparted his resolution to those who remained on the vessel, and asked their help to throw some more spars into the sea. The gunner, the boatswain's mate, and the youth before mentioned, strained every effort to do so, but very shortly the strength of the two former failed them, and sadly shaking their heads they went back to lean on the taffrail, leaving John Mackay and the youth to continue the work by themselves.

After strenuous efforts they succeeded in pitching overboard a spar, to which they had fastened a rope; then, securing a few loose floating planks, they fastened this wreckage to the other end of the rope, thus each acquiring a piece of wood to buoy him up in the attempt.

Yet, at the moment of casting off, John's heart failed him, old sailor though he was, and he was about to remount the ship's side and await death rather than meet it halfway. But, encouraged by his young companion, and, moreover, reflecting that the men on shore would not stay there indefinitely, and indeed might leave that very day, and, further, that next day he would be weaker than he was to-day, he resolved to take the risk and survive or perish.

He took a mournful leave of poor Mrs. Bremner, unable to walk and hardly able to speak, but promising her that, if he reached the coast, and if the coast contained any possible means of sending relief, this relief should be immediately sent. She, in return, gave him one of the remaining twenty-two rupees, which she hoarded with the greater care from a sense of the good service which this money had already rendered her.

John Mackay then descended on his spar, and, as he was occupied in praying and recommending himself to the care of Providence, the piece of wood cast loose of itself, and began to float, which appeared to him a happy omen, for it appeared like the hand of God launching him towards the shore. In fact, as if by a miracle, scarcely was he embarked, ere it seemed as if his stiff limbs, whose joints would hardly bend five minutes before, had recovered all their suppleness and some of their strength.

He soon found, however, that the spar, instead of helping and supporting him, fatigued him horribly; at every movement of the sea it turned and rolled over.

Several times immersed, and half choked, he let go of it; but, feeling it slip away from him, with a great effort he caught hold of it again and grasped it firmly under his arm as his only chance of safety. He found, however, to his great discouragement, that the current, instead of drifting him on shore, was carrying him in a direction parallel to it. Foreseeing that he could not endure this fatigue

much longer, he endeavoured to prevent the spar from revolving; to accomplish this, he stretched himself along it, passing round it an arm and a leg, while with the other arm and leg he struck out in the direction of the shore.

This method for some time answered very well, and he was beginning to feel more sanguine, when suddenly a huge wave broke over him, crushing him with its weight, and leaving him alone, rolling between two seas, stunned, half killed by the shock and nearly senseless.

Once more he rose to the surface and breathed again, when another great wave passed over his head and submerged him again.

Poor John thought this time that it was all over with him; his heart and his soul united, not in a prayer, but in a supreme cry to God, when he received a violent shock. This was caused by a wave dashing him against the spar, which had been washed away from him. He seized it again, rolled over and over with it several times, and, in the act of doing so, felt his body scraped against the sand and broken shells which the surge cast up on the coast, which assured him that the coast could not be very distant, although he could not see it. At length, as the billows succeeded one another with more and more violence, one of them flung him against a rock; leaving the spar, the swimmer clung to the rock with all his strength, fearing lest the returning surge might sweep him back into the deep sea.

The wave recoiled without detaching him.

Then, to escape the heavy rollers, he crawled on hands and knees along the shingly space between high and low water mark, availing himself of every rock, and holding fast to the bottom when a roaring and furious billow broke above him.

Thus at last he landed on terra firma.

When out of immediate peril, he was so completely exhausted that, without considering whether or no he was quite out of reach of the surf, he lay down on the sand, under the shelter of a rock, and fell fast asleep, unconscious whether this was the sleep of recuperation or the sleep of death.

When John Mackay awoke, he found himself the central

figure in a group of a dozen men, speaking Hindustani, which greatly reassured him, for he feared that he had been cast ashore out of the jurisdiction of the East India Company.

As he had a smattering of this language, he at once entered into conversation with them, and learnt that they were rayahs, or peasant subjects of the English Company, and the point of the coast on which he found himself was six days' journey from Chittagong, or Islamabad, capital of a district of the same name in the possession of the Company, on the frontier of the kingdom of Arakan, and ninety leagues from Calcutta.

Thus reassured with respect to the place on which he had landed, and the natives whom he found there, John asked them to give him a few grains of rice, even if they were raw. They told him to follow them, and they would do the same for him as they had done for his comrades, whom he would regain in five minutes. John attempted to rise, but found it impossible to do so. Two men then set him on his feet; but, as he was totally unable to walk, they lifted him in their arms, and transported him from the seashore to another group of men about four hundred yards away.

During the course of this transport they crossed a small stream, and John, seeing this fresh limpid water joyously prattling over the pebbles, begged them to allow him to drink. At first his guides refused; but he entreated them so persistently that at length they consented to set him down near the brook. He madly plunged his head into the water, and swallowed as much as he could, for it seemed to him that if he once took his mouth away he should never have an opportunity of drinking again. The Indians at length dragged him forcibly away, as they feared that an immoderate indulgence in this water would prove injurious to him. On the contrary, however, he found himself so much revived by this fresh and pure draught that, to his great joy, when raised on his feet again he was able to walk.

Leaning on the arms of his guides, he reached the second group of men for whom the party were making. Here he found, not only the youth who started with him, and the six Lascars who had preceded them, but also the gunner and the boatswain's mate, who, induced by their example,

had ventured into the sea after them, and had been successful in reaching the coast.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH MRS. BREMNER'S RUPEES AGAIN COME IN USEFUL

THE happiness which the good John experienced in again meeting his comrades, the joy he felt at being saved, the satisfaction he anticipated in eating the rice which he saw cooking, for a short time drove him almost crazy. Unable to collect his ideas, too weak to give utterance to them, and having only a vague and confused notion of what had taken place, he altogether forgot Mrs. Bremner.

Meantime the rice was cooked; John put some grains in his mouth and chewed them, but was unable to swallow.

One of the rayahs, seeing his vain efforts, took some water in the palm of his hand, and, as if in joke, threw it in his face. As he happened at that moment to open his mouth, some drops, entering it, washed the rice into his throat, and nearly choked him; but the effort he made set his muscles free, and gave him the power of swallowing. He was, however, for some time obliged to take a spoonful of water with every spoonful of rice; but this contraction of the gullet was only a sample of the troubles which poor John had to endure; the heat of the sun had chapped his lips, and even the inside of his mouth. Every movement of his jaws caused these cracks to bleed, thus causing him insufferable pain. Sleep came to his relief. After he had swallowed some spoonfuls of rice, and as much as a glassful of water, he sunk into a deep slumber, and did not awake till evening.

The moment of awakening, when he felt his physical faculties reviving, and his intellectual faculties resuming their course, was to his whole being as a new birth. His memory returned, the past presented itself before his eyes, and he cried out with remorseful anguish:

"Ah! poor Mrs. Bremner!"

Then, addressing the rayahs, he explained that he had left on board the Captain's wife and two or three other persons, who were able and willing to reward them if they would attempt their rescue.

This double inducement of performing a good action, and of being well paid for it, had the effect of making the rayahs promise to keep a watch over the vessel during the night. According to them, the night tide being higher than that of the day, the vessel would probably be carried nearer the shore, and thus the salvage would be facilitated.

This was all that John heard. The profound sleep into which he had fallen in the morning overcame him a second time. He stretched himself out on the sand, and was fast asleep before the Hindoo had finished speaking. At midnight they awoke him, informing him that the lady and her slave maid had been landed in safety. John got up at once without assistance, and walked unaided to join them.

Mrs. Bremner was seated by the fire; she had just drunk a glass of water and eaten a little rice. The utmost limit of human joy was mirrored in her face.

What John had said about Mrs. Bremner's rupees had nearly caused her death, instead of her rescue.

Some of the men who were patrolling the beach had already formed a plot to get off to the ship and loot it, when the honest fellow who had already given his turban to John, and who was a Burmese, watching for a propitious moment, reached the vessel and rescued her without asking for any reward.

The same night the vessel broke in two; the hold remained fast on the rocks, the deck floated so near the beach that the last two men left on board were enabled to reach the land. The night was dirty; it rained in torrents, and the shipwrecked party, half naked, without shelter, suffered greatly from the cold. The natives next morning gave them a little more rice; but they warned them that this was the last they would give for nothing, and in future all they got must be paid for. John Mackay's imprudence in speaking of Mrs. Bremner's rupees was bearing its fruit.

The Lascars, who were both the first to land and the first to levy a contribution from the poor widow's purse,

came to terms with the natives and began a meal by themselves, their religion not allowing them to eat in company with persons of another creed.

Mrs. Bremner, on her side, doubly grateful at having saved her money, and having the power by its means to benefit both herself and others, made a bargain for the food of all the others at two rupees a day for four days, at the end of which they hoped to find themselves strong enough to reach the nearest village, thirty miles away to the north.

The castaways were surprised that the natives should linger on the seaboard without any other apparent reason than that of being useful to them, but at low tide their object became apparent. They plunged into the sea, reached the ship, and overhauled it to see if in its shattered condition they could not carry off something of value. They found, however, only some broken muskets, a small quantity of iron and lead, and the copper sheathing.

Poor John, on witnessing this plundering, felt the grief which every good sailor feels on seeing the mutilation of the ship in which he has sailed. He told the natives who were engaged in it that they might suppose themselves in for a good thing at the time, but that when this wreckage came to the ears of the owners, a strict account would be required from them of all their appropriations. His remarks were very badly received, and he soon became aware that it would have been more judicious on his part not to have made them.

For the rest of the time the purveyors of rice docked his ration and served him last. They would probably even have starved him to death, had it not been for the good Burmese who had lent him his turban, and rescued Mrs. Bremner. He took John under his protection, and saved him from perishing with hunger. The stinting of food was not, however, without its good effects; for, had not the rice been parsimoniously served out, the party would have eaten more than was good for them, albeit small thanks were due to the natives for this niggardliness, seeing that their motives had no connection with the well-being of the castaways.

In order to economize their stock of rice, the natives hunted down some deer, which they skinned and roasted close by the castaways, without offering them a morsel ;

the latter humbly collected the bones, making with them a soup which seemed to them delicious, and which they enjoyed to the last drop.

Time passed on, but the unhappy party, fed only on water and a little rice, failed to recover strength. Mrs. Bremner, in particular, was so weak that she was unable to stand. She therefore entreated the Hindoos to carry her and her slave on a litter to the nearest village.

A long discussion ensued; the rapacity of the natives was aroused; they thought poor Mrs. Bremner's purse inexhaustible. At length it was settled that for twelve rupees the transportation should be made. Thus two rupees remained out of the thirty.

For these two rupees, which Mrs. Bremner convinced them were the last, it was agreed that four persons should be supplied with rice till the village was reached. These four persons were Mrs. Bremner, her slave, John Mackay, and the youth who had left the ship with him.

John Mackay, after testing his strength, feared that he should be unable to follow Mrs. Bremner's palanquin; he therefore tried to make a bargain to be likewise carried in a litter, but the Hindoos, pretending that he was twice as heavy as she was, demanded sixteen rupees, paid in advance. He had, therefore, no alternative but to drag himself along on foot after Mrs. Bremner's palanquin, leaning on a bamboo.

The start was made on the 17th of July, the little band which accompanied the palanquin consisting of John, the gunner, the boatswain's mate, and the boy. As for the Lascars, they made acquaintance with the natives, and, being of nearly the same race, remained with them.

The first stage was about two miles; they then halted an hour. During this halt John slept. On awaking he felt so tired that he did not think he could possibly continue the journey. He nevertheless resumed it, but was obliged to stop so frequently that he perceived his remaining with the party would render the transport impossible. He therefore stayed behind, and the boy, who was very fond of him, kept him company. There was no fear of his getting lost, for he was in mortal dread of tigers, and never strayed away twenty yards from the beaten track.

About four o'clock in the afternoon John and the boy had quite lost sight of their companions, when they perceived a party of natives of Arakan, called Maghs. These Indians were engaged in cooking rice near the seashore, and did not see the two travellers, or at any rate took no notice of them.

John, left by the palanquin bearers without any food, was very anxious to share the dinner which was cooking on the beach; but not knowing the language, and, worse still, having no money, he did not know how to set about it.

Begging seemed to him, if not the surest, the least dangerous plan; he therefore approached the Maghs, with an outstretched hand and a suppliant eye; his wretched appearance, the rags which covered him, left no doubt about his misery; at the first sight of him the chief of the party appeared moved with compassion, and addressing him in Portuguese, asked by what fatality he had been reduced to this miserable condition.

Fortunately John, who spoke imperfectly the language in which the question was conveyed, was able to converse with him. He related his shipwreck, the frightful famine which he and his companions had endured for twenty days; how by a miraculous good fortune they had at length succeeded in landing; how, when on shore, thanks to Mrs. Bremner's rupees, they had obtained some aid; and finally how, not being able to pay the palanquin bearers, he had been abandoned by them on the road.

The chief found this story all the more probable, inasmuch as an hour before he had seen Mrs. Bremner's palanquin go by, borne by the Hindoos, and followed by John's two shipwrecked companions. He was a kind-hearted man; he cursed the unfeeling brutes who had left a poor wretch to die, and with the dignity of a king who offers hospitality to a neighbouring prince, he led John to his fire, and invited him and the youth who was with him to sit down beside it. He then served him with the best he had, advising him not to eat much, not out of parsimony, but for fear of overloading an enfeebled stomach, promising him sufficient supplies to suffice amply both for him and his companion, from now till they arrived at the next village.

He was as good as his word, giving them three days'

rations of rice, and assuring him that the tigers, which have a great fear of fire and smoke, would never venture to meddle with them if they took the precaution of lighting a fire before going to sleep; and as they had neither flint nor steel nor tinder, he showed them how to light a fire by the friction of two pieces of bamboo.

Moreover, as the wounds on his legs and feet were full of sand and caused him great suffering, he washed and dressed these wounds with his own hands, bathing them and rubbing them with ghee. He then swathed John's feet in linen bandages, and, seeing him much cheered, he wished him a pleasant journey.

After his experience of the greed of the Lascars and the callousness of the Hindoos, the behaviour of the Magh chief deeply moved poor John, who could not find it in his heart to leave him. Unfortunately the chief, who was a travelling merchant, was proceeding in a direction diametrically opposite to his, being on his way from Chittagong, his ordinary place of abode, to sell goods in Arakan. They were, therefore, forced to part; John knew not how to express his gratitude to the good merchant; his tears spoke for him, and the chief could not doubt that he had done a good action to a grateful heart.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

AFTER marching two leagues, John and his companion overtook Mrs. Bremner and her escort, who had halted in a hut and were eating rice.

John haughtily drew from a knapsack which he carried on his shoulders his and his companion's rations of rice, and dined apart from them. Whilst so occupied, several Hindoos and Lascars, who had remained behind to plunder the vessel, likewise rejoined them. On the road they had met the merchant, who reproached them severely for their inhumanity. This would have produced little effect upon them, but as he went on to say that John Mackay

was a man of consequence, who very probably might petition the Governor of Calcutta to make a severe example of them, they took his words greatly to heart, and from that moment treated him with the greatest marks of respect. But he contemptuously repulsed their tardy politeness, contenting himself with accepting the guide's offer to carry his bag of rice.

Next day they arrived on the banks of a river which, on sounding, they found to be so deep and rapid that its crossing at high tide would be attended with great difficulty. They therefore waited for low tide, and employed these few hours in constructing a raft of bamboos. When the water had gone down, they launched the raft on the river. Five or six Indians swam on either side to steady it and keep it from drifting, and they reached the opposite side without mishap.

John's limbs grew so stiff that he feared it would again be necessary to leave him behind; but, eventually, his will overcoming his weakness, he arrived at the halting-place almost as soon as the rest of the caravan.

Next day they reached the village where the Hindoos lived. John was so fatigued that he entered the first hut which he found open, throwing himself, with apologies, on a mat, where he slept the same irresistible sleep which had previously overcome him. When he woke, he found himself surrounded by people who, pitying his condition, took him to the Zemindar of the village, by whom he was most cordially received, and orders were given to serve him with all kinds of refreshments.

So little was John accustomed to this compassionate treatment, that he was greatly affected by the attentions of the Zemindar; but learning that this village was only four miles distant from Ramoo, the Company's first post, and having made the reasonable request to the Zemindar to be furnished with means of transport thither, he was greatly surprised to find that, under pretext of care for his health, the latter made a thousand excuses to detain him, offering, in a fortnight, when he would be quite recovered, to send him to Calcutta in a thirty-oared canoe.

John immediately suspected that this solicitude on

the part of the Zemindar, and the great sympathy expressed with his misfortunes were all affected, and that the Zemindar was interested in his being kept away from a town where he could report the circumstances of the shipwreck. On further consideration he became more than ever convinced that, not only was the Zemindar sharing in the plunder, but that he wished to retain the monopoly of it for the future.

The fact was that the cargo, consisting, as we have said, entirely of teak, must be perfectly uninjured, and this offered to the Zemindar's cupidity an irresistible temptation.

John therefore insisted on the Zemindar's sending him to Ramoo; but, seeing that the latter was bent upon detaining him by every possible means, he pretended to give way, at the same time preparing to start by himself the next morning.

Just as he was about to leave, the Zemindar came into his hut.

The cunning rascal had guessed his intentions, and now came to meet the matter fairly and squarely, begging John to sign a certificate absolving him from any share in plundering the *Juno*; this certificate, he said, was necessary to prevent the magistrate for the district of Islamabad, who resided at Chittagong, from holding him responsible for what had occurred at the scene of the wreck, and might occur again. On his signing the certificate, the Zemindar would provide him with a canoe to take him to Ramoo or wherever he wished.

John, desirous above all things of getting to Ramoo, signed the certificate as requested, but took care to preface it with a full history of the wreck of the *Juno*, so that the Zemindar could not present this document to the officer in charge at Ramoo without acquainting the latter that there were survivors of the wreck who were in need of help.

The event proved John to be in the right in his mistrust, for next day, instead of being furnished with the promised facilities, it was the Zemindar who started off for Ramoo, furnished with his certificate, which he handed to the Phougedar. This official, seeing that the paper related to

shipwrecked British subjects, forwarded it to Lieutenant Towers, in command of a detachment at Ramoo, who summoned the Zemindar, and having questioned him and noticed the shuffling answers he gave, immediately sent John a canoe, an escort, provisions, and money. The commander of the escort was further charged with a letter for John Mackay, who, it may be readily imagined, not having seen the Zemindar again, remained very uneasy in his village.

On the evening of the 22nd, seeing that the promised canoe did not come, and that every time he called on the Zemindar he was told that he was out, John determined at all risks to start for Ramoo the next morning. In order not to arouse suspicion by requisitioning provisions, each of his companions saved a portion of his supper and put it aside for John Mackay, who slept with this food beside him. Everything was arranged for him to get clear off before daybreak; but, just as he was going to sleep, a knock came to his door. It was the escort and the boat which had arrived.

Next morning all the party left the village on their way for Ramoo, which they reached about mid-day. Lieutenant Towers was at the landing-stage awaiting the castaways, whom he took immediately to his own house, providing Mrs. Bremner with an apartment to herself, and disposing of the others in the building. For three days he would not allow them to do anything but get up their health and strength, and during these three days, says John Mackay, he waited on us, doctored us, and even cooked for us.

On the 26th the party were embarked in two canoes, and on the 28th they arrived at Chittagong, where Lieutenant Price was in command. Here they were received and treated as at Ramoo, Lieutenant Price doing for them what Lieutenant Towers had done before. After a day's rest, which he greatly needed, John Mackay appeared before Mr. Thomson, District Judge for Islamabad, before whom he made a declaration. The Judge immediately sent a guard to the wrecked vessel to stop further plundering.

A full account of all that had taken place was signed by Mrs. Bremner, the Captain's widow, John Mackay, second

mate, and Thomas Johnson, gunner, and sent to the ship's owners at Madras. A week later, on the 8th of August, feeling pretty strong again, John Mackay started to return to the *Juno* and save what was left. He embarked on a canoe, taking with him carpenter's and all other necessary tools.

On the 12th he arrived at Ramoo, where he rested at Lieutenant Towers's house; on the 14th he proceeded on his journey in a palanquin; and on the 17th he reached the bay where the ship struck, which he named Juno Bay.

Two huts were constructed, and next day they commenced stacking the timber on the shore. When this work was finished, the hull was set on fire and the iron collected, this being the only remaining object of any value.

About the beginning of November, Captain Galloway, ship *Restoration*, arrived in the bay, sent from Calcutta to load the iron and the timber. On the 25th everything was stowed, and the same day the *Restoration*, with John Mackay on board, sailed for Calcutta, where she arrived in safety on the 12th of December, 1795.

Now, if the reader wishes to know, after reading the account of this terrible disaster, what became of the principal persons who figured in it, we will tell him.

John Mackay, completely recovered from the effects of his sufferings, was, in the beginning of 1796, appointed to command one of the Company's ships, which ship sailed for Europe and arrived in August, 1796.

Mrs. Bremner recovered her health and strength, grew more beautiful and charming than ever, and made an excellent marriage.

Lastly, the boy who had such a dread of tigers, dreading the sea equally, and with more reason, settled at Chittagong, where he lived and died in the honest avocation of a travelling merchant,—an avocation selected, no doubt, in remembrance of those Portuguese merchants who had so generously assisted him and John Mackay on the evening when they had been cruelly abandoned by the Hindoos.

THE SCOURGE OF NAPLES

NAPLES possesses a glorious sky, a pellucid air, an azure sea. Its climate is perfect, except when the wind is due north, or due south. Naples has its promontory of Posilippo, its gulf of Baja, its oysters of Lake Fusaro to the west; it has Vesuvius, Pompeii, Castellamare, Sorrento to the east. But Naples has a scourge that utterly spoils all these beauties and delights.

Is it typhus, cholera, yellow fever?

No, these are only plagues, and what I write about is a scourge, a curse. The curse of Naples is mendicancy.

Given mendicancy, such as it exists at Naples, an earthly paradise becomes a hell.

The first thing that grips the traveller by the throat as he lands at the Custom-house Quay, is mendicancy.

You do not recognize the evil thing at first sight until you are actually in the Street of Toledo or of Santa Lucia; you will find at first it wears a veil of decency. To begin with, in the Custom-house, the Customs officer, as he searches your box, shows you the palm of his hand. Then you come on a soldier; the man, if you have a bit of ribbon in your button-hole, or failing that, a good coat and well-brushed boots, will present arms to you and hint at a gratuity.

The facchino, who tears your handbags away from you by force, and carries them to your conveyance, begins the whine for charity.

The coachman again, overpaid doubly and trebly as he will be through your ignorance of the proper fare, is not satisfied with robbery, but asks for more.

At the entrance to your hotel, your torments cease; the waiters, so neatly dressed, so clean and smart, are too

well drilled to beg on your arrival. They will await your departure.

There you are, smiling and happy! you have had a more or less stormy passage, and are glad to feel dry land under your feet again. The earth certainly still seems to rock a little like the boat; but your reason shows you how impossible this is, knowing, as you do, that the double motion of the earth, that through space round the sun, and that of the diurnal revolution on its axis, imparts no sense of movement to the beings which dwell upon the globe. You thus become reassured as to your equilibrium, you open your window, lean over the balcony and repeat the sacred, traditional, everlasting words, "See Naples and die."

Poor fond tourist, how I pity thee!

Pardon me, dear traveller, for saying this. I do not know you, yet I treat you as a familiar friend. You must forgive me. The love I bear my neighbour, and the sorrow I feel at the sight of injured innocence, must be my excuse. You are then in your balcony, looking at the sea, at Vesuvius, at the houses of Castellamare which adorn the seashore and at those of Sorrento which dot the orange groves with white. Capri then catches your eye for a moment, and you are thinking of Tiberius, of Sir Hudson Lowe, of General Lamarque, of the Blue Grotto, when suddenly you become conscious of a murmur rising from the street below. The sound is not that of the brook, babbling among its pebbles, nor quite that of the leaves, rustling in the wind; the tones are monotonous, nasal, plaintive, such as you have heard nowhere else. You look down and see half a score of paupers who hold up to you, one, the stump of an arm; another, half a leg; a third, the battered remnants of a hat. What you are listening to is a prayer, in which you are addressed as *Eccelenza*, and besought to give a *grano*. It is the first time you have been called Your Excellency, and as the title tickles your vanity, you deem it worth double the price demanded.

You throw down a silver ten-grano piece, and call out "*Per tutti*," delighted to be able to show the dirty vagabonds below what you have been impressing on the Customs

officer, on the hotel manager, and on his waiters, namely, that you know Italian.

Your ten poor petitioners throw themselves in a heap on the piece of money and struggle for it. Instead of sharing it between them, the strongest man keeps it all, and the murmur grows into a storm.

Then all chatter to Your Excellency at once, all clamour, all shout, all weep, all sigh, all groan; and the whole seething mass twists, writhes, gathers in a crowd, separates again, and goes through such horrible contortions, that you see before you, in anticipation, the Gehenna of Holy Writ.

You feel deep pity for all this misery. But since, while it excites pity, it also almost turns your stomach, you throw down a second coin, saying, still in the soft Italian tongue you love to pronounce, "Very well! Fight it out among yourselves!"

And you shut your window, reflecting that the distant view from Naples may be truly glorious, but the foreground is hideous.

"I will go and see the more distant landscape," say you. You ring; a waiter answers the bell; you demand a carriage.

"In ten minutes' time it shall be here, your Excellency," says the attendant.

You pass the ten minutes in arranging your necktie, in brushing your hair and adjusting your eyeglasses accurately on the bridge of your nose. The carriage is announced, and you go down stairs.

At the door, you find awaiting you, not some dozen beggars, but a whole army of mendicants. The word has been passed that, at a certain hotel, a distinguished *forestiere* is staying, who gives alms. The lawful and the lawless, the cripples in tubs, the tattered on crutches, the deaf, the blind, the lepers, have gathered from far and near. You are no longer your Excellency—that is too common a title—you are now your Royal Highness the Prince.

This second patent of nobility costs you yet another piece of silver. From that time forth you are lost! You have put in practice one of the Christian virtues, you have followed the Gospel precept, and given alms of what you possess.

For you Naples has become that tenth circle of the Nether Hell, into the depths of which Dante himself dared not plunge.

II

Let us suppose, dear reader, that you have been a week in Naples, and that, having seen all the sights of the town and its neighbourhood, you now go out only for your own amusement: to dream day dreams, to lounge in your carriage, to collect your thoughts, to commune with yourself or with God.

Probably now, when coming out of your hotel, when walking through the army of beggars, which has been growing larger day by day, and which grumbles if you do not give enough, and threatens you if you give nothing; probably, I say, at this period of your stay, you will shout to your coachman as loud as you can, "Go on! Go on!"

You have given up speaking Italian, you have proclaimed far and wide your ignorance of the language. To every word addressed to you in the beggar's whine, you answer in forbidding accents: "*Non capisco*" (I do not understand). This is your second manner.

At Naples, the foreigner has three different styles, like Raphael. At first, he gives money to the Customs officer, to the sentries, to the porters, to the cabbies, to the beggars. First manner.

After this, he answers every voice that implores, every hand that is outstretched, every hat that pesters him, every clatter of the beggar's box, with the one phrase, "*Non capisco.*" Second manner.

At last, however, he swears, rages, thunders, pours out every term of abuse he knows, borrows the coachman's whip, and lays about him. This is the third manner.

You, my dear tourist! Allow me to call you *my dear* tourist, for we have been friends for ten days. At Naples, after ten days' acquaintance, we do not ask you to dinner, for at Naples people never do ask each other to dine, but we address you by your Christian name or nickname.

Well my dear tourist, to resume, you are so far only at

the second manner. So you say to your driver "Go on! Go on!" in your native tongue.

The driver starts at a gallop, but presently goes slower and slower. As he gets to the entrance to the Chiaja, under pretence of falling into single file, although there is not another vehicle in sight, he drops into a walk. Just after passing the Hotel Vittoria, when your horses have got half-way round the square, and have their heads pointing towards the Grotto of Pozzuoli, your carriage is suddenly surrounded by virtue of some inexplicable strategical manœuvre, not as at Florence with flower girls—this would not be very disagreeable, for some of these pretty merchants are as charming and fresh as their own bouquets—but by dirty men selling flowers, who hang on to your carriage, stand on the steps, climb over the back seats, and push their bouquets into your face. You have been a purchaser of bouquets for four days. The first day you have given a piastre for each nosegay; the second day a ducat; the third, half a ducat; the fourth, ten granos.

On the fifth day you see that flowers are very cheap at Naples, while the camellias have wire stalks and the violets have no scent, and you take a dislike to all flowers; then, when you are pursued by flowers, you fly from them, and finding that they follow faster than you can flee, you take to hating flowers. You detest, you curse, you excommunicate all flowers.

And yet, you know well how sweet a thing is a flower, when, instead of being forced upon you by an ugly, dirty pedlar, it is given by a soft, white hand; when it holds, mingled with its own perfume, that of the fair lips which have touched it, and carries, hidden in its tender petals, the memory of a loving kiss.

Well, then, here is another illusion of yours vanished. You have been four days in Naples, and you hate flowers. And why? Because they are pressed on you by the hideous beggar horde. Oh, but do not despair! Let some fairy carry you to a meadow of Touraine, to the pasture lands of Normandy, or to a roadside hedge in La Vendée, and you would soon, with childish glee, be gathering nosegays of daisies, buttercups, and periwinkles.

You escape from the flower sellers and continue your drive. In Margellina you pass between living hedges of beggars. But you shut your eyes and avoid the sight of them, and fortunately they cannot follow you, for your carriage travels fast over the level road; moreover, it is the lame beggars' district. But at the Villa Barbaja the road ascends, and your driver brings his horses to a walk.

Any excuse is good enough for the Neapolitan driver to make his horses walk. The road is uphill, the road is downhill, the road is paved, the road is sandy, the road is winding. It is always the fault of the road, never that of the horses.

Directly the horses come to a walk, a tribe of troglodytes appears from among the quarries in the hills. There are children of all ages from three to twelve. The youngest, from three to five years, pretend to cry. Others, from five to seven years of age, call out to you that they have had nothing to eat since last night. Others, from seven to nine years, play castanettes with their chins. Lastly, the biggest of all turn cartwheels. Of those who possess neither musical nor gymnastic talents, some cry "Viva Garibaldi" and some "Viva Cialdini," so that all may be pleased and both sets of opinion may be fairly represented.

You are terribly tempted to get out of your carriage and smash up at least one of these young scamps. It is not philanthropy which keeps you seated on your cushions; it is nothing but the fear of consequences; you feel that if only capital punishment were abolished, you would gladly run the risk of the galleys. At last you get past them. All goes well till you get to the top of the hill. As you begin the descent, at a turn in the road, you come on a hidden house, lying as it were in ambush, with an open door. It is a fresh blockhouse of the enemy, garrisoned by little girls. These latter cannot turn cartwheels, but they address you as "Your Highness," and the lady who accompanies you, if there is one, as "Beautiful Princess."

You can get along faster as you are going downhill. You call out to your driver "Gallop!"

You leave behind all these ragged brats who have spoilt for you one of the most beautiful views of Naples, that of the

bay of Pozzuoli from Nisida to Cape Miseno, as seen from the summit of Posilippo. Your coachman slackens speed again; look out for squalls. A quarry pit comes in sight on your left hand, a sort of hermit comes up from it. This holy man enjoys a very doubtful reputation; when night falls and the road is unfrequented, he likes, they say, to see the time by travellers' watches and to count the money they may carry in their purses. He comes forward now and quietly plants himself in the middle of the road. The first three days you met him, you gave him something; this time, in consequence of the evil stories you have heard about him, you simply say to your driver, "Whip up the horses!" The coachman obeys your orders unwillingly. The Neapolitan coachmen have a great weakness for their begging compatriots, because it is their fares, and not they themselves, who have to pay the money. The good hermit, to avoid being run over, gets out of the way, grumbling as he goes. If you are obliged to repass his cave by night, take care to carry a good revolver.

A hundred paces further you come on a board painted white, and lettered in French as follows:

GROTTE DE SÉJAN (Sejanus' Grotto)
CONDUISANT A L'ÉCUEIL DE VIRGILE (leading to Virgil's Rock)

Here is something for us to argue about with the authorities responsible for the inscription. How is it that in Naples, the town of the learned, the learned are not clever enough to know that this grotto is simply the tunnel made by Lucullus as a road from one side of the mountain to the other—that is, from his villa of Pausilippus to his Island of Nisida—and that Sejanus, the Minister of Tiberius, and lover of his master's daughter-in-law, never had anything to do with making it, bored, as it was, by the magnificent conqueror of Mithridates? So much for the first line, "*Grotte de Séjan.*"

As for the second line of the legend, the artist in calligraphy who adorned the board with these majestic capitals translated *scuola* (school) by *écueil* (a rock); he was quite at liberty

to do so: but, again, I appeal to authority and common sense. You are promised the sight of Virgil's Rock, and you expect to see a rock, on which the author of the "Æneid" may have suffered shipwreck, perhaps on his return from the journey to Brindisi, or on his way home from Athens. Instead of this, you are shown one of those circular seats to which the Ancients gave the name of schools, because three or four chatterers they called philosophers, seated upon them, used to be listened to by a dozen simpletons they called disciples.

In a learned city like Naples, such gross mistakes ought not to be tolerated. All very well for France, for, as everybody knows, all Frenchmen are uneducated boors, a fact your Neapolitan especially is firmly convinced of. As for Lucullus, who had the tunnel made, or of his house, not a word is said of either.

If you were to talk of the house of Lucullus with the two cicerones who show you the Grotto of Sejanus, probably they would answer you as a native of Frankfort replied to me when I asked to be shown the house of Goethe.

"Sir, I do not know the house; it is probably one that has left off business, or that has become bankrupt."

Here we have another kind of mendicancy; only this is more serious than the other sort, seeing that it is carried on under a Government guarantee, for the sole benefit of two ignorant, lazy rascals. We hereby request the Minister for Public Instruction to do so much for science as to change the reading of the signboard in question, and instead of the words—"Grotto of Sejanus, leading to Virgil's Rock," to have the following inscribed: "The Grotto of Lucullus, leading to a circular seat, commonly called (without any historical foundation) the School of Virgil."

III

As you have now seen the Grotto of Lucullus under the name of the Grotto of Sejanus, and a circular seat called Virgil's Rock, which has no inscription or bas-relief to attract your attention; as, except two amphitheatres, one

of which is marvellously rich and elegant, and the villa of Lucullus, which no one has said a word about, although it is not without some merit of its own; as, except the above mentioned, you have not seen any striking curiosities, you return again through the famous tunnel, in the clearing of which Ferdinand II. spent seventy-four thousand ducats (thereby proving his enlightened taste for art), and you continue your route along the road you had temporarily left, to visit the further side of Posilippo.

Here, we must give the scene the credit of being quiet and peaceful. Except for three or four fat, plump urchins who await your arrival at the foot of the hill and run alongside crying: "*Morti di fame!*" in tones of direst distress; except, also, for a refreshment vendor, who plants his table in the middle of the road and insists on your getting down to eat Fusaro oysters, you drive on for about two miles without anything to disturb you.

But about five hundred yards from Pozzuoli, three or four loafers get up from the side of the road, where they are sitting; one offers you a miniature Egyptian idol, another an old coin, and a third cries:

"The Temple of Serapis, your Excellency!"

The man with the Egyptian god and the man with the antique coin give you up after a run of from a hundred to a hundred and fifty yards, according to whether your carriage goes faster or slower. But this is not at all the case with the servitor of the Temple of Serapis. As the abode of the god of health is at the further side of the town, while you have not yet passed Pozzuoli, and have not taken the road to Baja, he hopes to practise his trade on you. Nothing discourages him; he lays hold of your carriage, adapts his pace to that of the horses, and, whatever you may say to drive him away, he repeats in a voice which becomes more and more breathless:

"Temple of Serapis, Excellency! Temple of Serapis!"

You shout at him, in Italian this time:

"I have been at your Temple of Serapis, I know it—I have seen your columns, with their lithophagons, I know them by heart—I have tasted your mineral spring—I know it, I know it all perfectly, I tell you, I tell you."

This time, it is the man's turn not to understand Tuscan, so he repeats again in Neapolitan :

" Temple of Serapis !—Temple of Serapis ! "

As you draw near Pozzuoli, the first-grade beggars reappear.

We will, by your leave, proceed to classify the beggars of Naples into three degrees or grades.

First Grade—Beggars asking for alms.

Second Grade—Beggars seeking by force or strategy to show you antiquities or to sell you green idols or rusty medallions.

Third Grade—Beggars soliciting posts of emolument, decorations, or Court favours.

Perhaps you will say I ought to have numbered the grades of beggars in the inverse order.

By all that's righteous, No ! I put the beggar who insists on selling you his green idol, or his rusty coin, above the beggar who would sell his conscience or his vote ; and far below the beggar who implores the passer-by, be he French or English, to throw him a *grano* I class the mendicant who begs a chamberlain's key, a crown of honour, or the portfolio of a Minister, from Francis II. or from Victor Emmanuel. I hold, therefore, to my system of numbering. To me the professional office-seeker is the very lowest class of mendicant.

Pardon me for my digression, or rather for the recitation of my creed.

Let us return to the first-grade beggars.

Beware of a little chapel on the left of the road, containing a group in earthenware representing Christ on the Cross, blood dropping from every wound, and at His feet a gentleman dressed in a bottle-green coat and holding up his child to look at the distressing sight. It is there that you will find the first-grade beggars, awaiting you in force, provided with a money box, which they rattle as they beg.

You enter Pozzuoli with a princely escort in the middle of a symphony of laments tuned to every note in the gamut, from lower F to upper D : " Dying of hunger," " Pity a poor blind man," " Do not forget an unhappy cripple," " Spare a copper for a widow with eleven children," " Charity to an

old man of seventy-four years of age whose parents are entirely dependent on his exertions!" And above all the chorus sounds the voice of your cicerone crying "Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis!" But worst of all, you find the gateway blocked by empty carriages, waiting there to snap up travellers, as spiders lie in wait to pounce on flies. The police could easily force them into ranks on each side of the road, so as to leave a way in the middle; everybody would feel the benefit of the regulation, none more so than the drivers themselves. But there! there are no police in Pozzuoli, and never have been, since Sylla, to assuage the pains of death, had the Syndic strangled for refusing to pay his contribution to the State.

Having got through the gate, you think your horses will be able to trot on again. Ah well, yes! but then the road is up in the village of Pozzuoli. I cannot quite understand the phenomenon, but for some reason or other the paving stones are always in process of being taken up there and never being relaid. Then you begin to see that, whether you like it or not, you must get out of your carriage, put your hands inside your pockets and hold your handkerchief tight if you blow your nose, grasp your box firmly if you would take a pinch of snuff, and never let go of your purse if there is any money in it. A gentleman of great respectability and veracity told me that once he had his spectacles stolen off his nose. As he was extremely short-sighted, when his spectacles were gone, he could not see the thief, and this was the end of his glasses.

Thus you find yourself plunged into a jostling crowd of beggars, paviors, pickpockets, asses, mules, sellers of eggs or carrots, sham cicerones who want to take you, the one to the cathedral, the other to the amphitheatre, coachmen who vociferate "Baja, Mare Morto, Lago Fusaro!" and still you hear, above all these shouts, the voice of your original cicerone, who is yelling, "Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis!"

Four men lay hold of your carriage, they steady it, push it, lift it; they are not enough; two more join them, making six in all. You lose half an hour's time, but at

last a paved street is reached. This is blocked by a barricade! Why a barricade? Surely we live in the piping times of peace. The object of it is, that five or six urchins, who have constructed the barricade to prevent you from passing, may take it down again to allow you to pass.

The men who carry, who push, who support your carriage and the boys who construct and demolish the barricade are only two varieties of the great corporation of beggars. Put your hand in your pocket; if you have given nothing to those who have done nothing for you, some remuneration is at least due to those who have worked in your service.

You again get into your carriage, the sweat of your brow running down; there are some thirty beggars surrounding you.

Your horses humanely refuse to move; they cannot take a step without treading on a man, a woman, or a child.

Then it is that, exasperated, out of your mind, panting, furious with rage, you seize the coachman's whip and lay about you among the mob. This is the tourist's third manner. The horses start off again at a trot; at last you think yourself free from all the vermin, you draw a long breath, you venture on a long-drawn "Ah!" of relief. All of a sudden you catch, almost in your ear, "Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis! Temple of Serapis!" It is your cicerone, who has entrenched himself upon the box-seat of your carriage, and who braves you with impunity from that point of vantage. You will not get rid of him before you get to the Lucrine Lake.

IV

You have been told, have you not, that the dogs of Constantinople are divided into distinct communities; that each dog as long as he remains in his own district is an independent member of his republic, but that if he dares to cross the border, he is immediately torn to pieces by the dogs of the neighbouring community. It is just the same with the cicerones.

The cicerone of the Temple of Serapis leaves you at the

Lucrine Lake, because he is then on the preserves of the cicerones who show Nero's Ovens, the Wonderful Fishpond, and the ruins of Baiæ. Then you watch him returning thence on foot, and quite out of countenance, to Pozzuoli, where he will seek for another traveller more gullible than you. You have your revenge!

But in vain do you flatter yourself you have reached the end of your expedition, that is, the old castle of Baja, which guards the passage from the Gulf to the little Creek of Bauli.

The castle is there, like the City of the Iron Gates, which bars the road from Russia to Persia.

But at Naples stone walls are not difficult obstacles to surmount. "No town is impregnable, if you can get a mule with a load of gold into it," was a maxim of King Philip, father of Alexander the Great. You will be able to force the gates of Baiæ at a cheaper rate than this. Take a half piastre out of your pocket, and the feat is accomplished. No, the walls which are difficult to break through at Naples are the walls of men, the living ramparts.

Arrived at the extremity of the Lucrine Lake, you will find a triple line of fortification.

The first: Cicerones showing Nero's Ovens.

The second: Cicerones showing the Wonderful Fishpond.

The third: Cicerones showing the Temples of Venus Genetrix, of Mercury, and of Diana Lucifera, which, as a matter of fact, are not temples at all, but baths.

There, whether you will or no, even if it is your tenth visit, you are forced to get on a man's back and ride him through the subterranean passages; you are obliged to run the risk of apoplexy in Nero's Ovens, and while waiting for the egg, which a broken-winded guide cooks for you in the boiling water, you must listen to his absurd description of the Wonderful Fishpond, which is neither more nor less than the magnificent reservoir which used to supply fresh water to the Grotto of Misenum. After that you are dragged to the Temples of Venus Genetrix, of Mercury and of Diana Lucifera, which, as I have said, are nothing else than the ruins of those enervating baths which caused

Propertius to fear for his mistress Cynthia's sojourn at Baiæ. Well then, of this again I say, the matter is one which concerns the Ædile's Court and the Office of Public Instruction. It is a disgrace to both institutions that foreigners should come away from Baiæ with erroneous legends foisted on them by cicerones licensed by the Government.

It is not the business of the authors of the *Corricolo*, as the learned M. Niccolini calls us, to set them right.

As the port of Baja is about as far as your hired horses can take you, you stop for a few minutes to admire the beautiful bay of which Horace says:

Nullus in orbe sinus Baiis prælucet amœnis.[1]

Then getting into your carriage to return, you ask if there is no way of avoiding Pozzuoli. Pozzuoli is unavoidable. You go through Pozzuoli again; you find awaiting you, not the cicerones, for they are on the road from Naples, but your mendicants, your barricade and your carriage porters. Only, this time, as the road beyond the town is downhill, you order the driver to go fast. He whips up his horses, sighing as he does it, and in the twinkling of an eye you reach the establishment of the oyster man.

At this point the road divides into two. Not for anything in the world would you again go through the martyrdom you suffered in coming, so you say—"Go by the Grotto of Pozzuoli." The driver takes the left road and you arrive at the Grotto of Pozzuoli. The Grotto of Pozzuoli resembles the turnstiles at the Louvre in this: you can only go through at a walking pace. As you come out, two beggars spring up at the horses' heads. One rattles a money box and cries, "Give to the Madonna." The Madonna—*honi soit qui mal y pense*—lies in the former Temple of Priapus, whence came the two harpies immortalized by Petronius.

The other is there to show you, willy-nilly, Virgil's Tomb, which perhaps is no more the tomb of Virgil than Virgil's rock is Virgil's school.

You give your alms to the Madonna, you climb up, for the fourth or fifth time, to the tomb of Virgil. He must be at least a fairly great poet, considering you have to make

[1] No bay in all the world outvies the gentle charms of Baiæ.

so many different pilgrimages to his ashes. You once more pass by your flower-sellers, through your mendicants, and you reach your hotel, bruised, weary, ground to powder, paralysed, impotent, dead, assassinated!

Assassinated by whom? By the hordes of beggars.

Henceforth, there is for you no more the limpid sea, the bright clear air, the deep blue sky; no more for you is Vesuvius, or Pompeii, Castellamare, Sorrento, Capri; for you there is no Chiaja, no Posilippo, no Margellina, no Gulf of Pozzuoli, no Bay of Baja; nothing is left you but a hideous spectre, a gibbering ghost, a foul phantom, a fury, a shrew, a harpy; in one word, Mendicancy! And you say:

"Yes, I will away; I will leave the land; I will escape the fiends! For me, better are the frozen plains of Siberia, better the burning sands of the Sahara, better the mistral, the sirocco, the khamsin, better the mountain blast that drove Gastibelza mad, or the icy breeze of Madrid that will not blow out a candle yet will kill its man; better all and any of these than Naples with its Bay, its sky, its climate, its Vesuvius—and its beggars!"

Printed in Great Britain by
BUTLER & TANNER,
Frome and London